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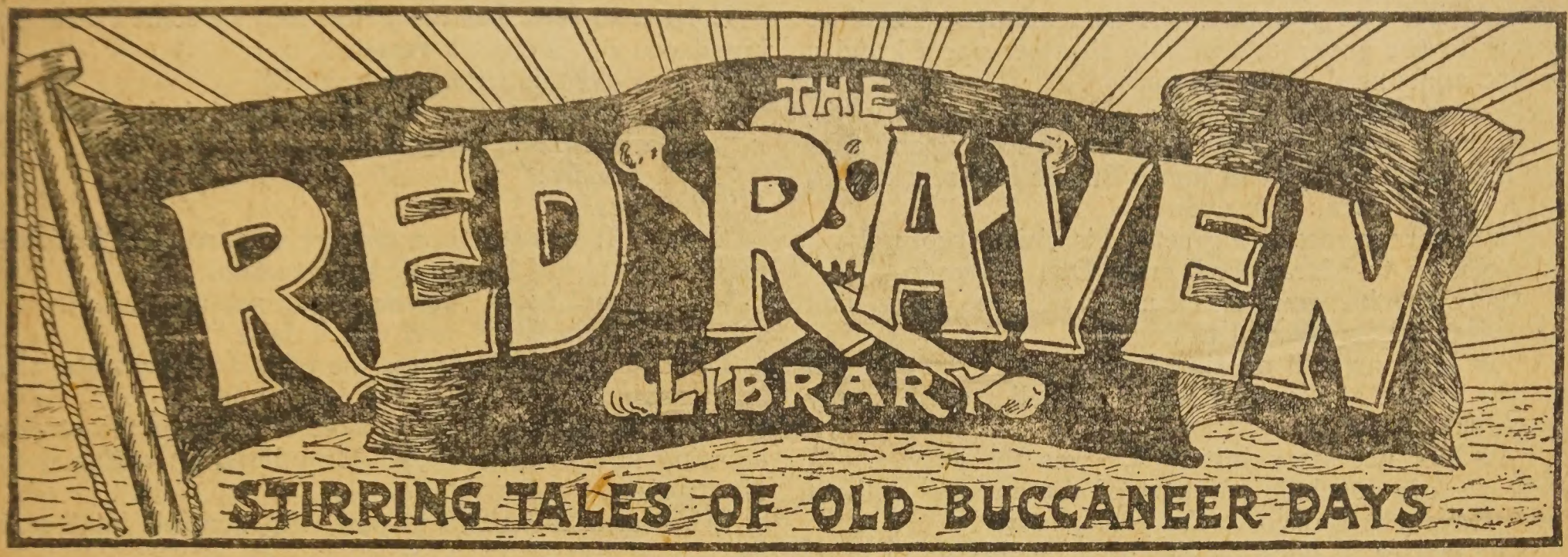
STIRRING TALES OF OLD BUCCANEER DAYS

MORGAN'S COAST RAIDERS

OR THAD AT THE SACKING OF MARACAIBO

As Sir Henry Morgan held up the lantern and looked at the strange thing that seemed to be bearing down upon him, he became horror-stricken.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE: At some time or other the fascination of life at sea takes hold upon the imagination of the average lad who has healthy red blood in his veins. From the day he is able to read the stirring adventures of Robinson Crusoe, a yearning to travel and look upon strange sights the world over takes possession of him. Usually this gradually gives way to the less strenuous pleasures that surround him at home, but in innumerable instances it has led young fellows to go forth to seek their fortune. And next to Robinson Crusoe, boys have somehow loved to read of the bold buccaneers who harried the sea at the time Spain was sending the treasures stolen from Mexico and Peru across to the mother country. In this series we purpose giving thrilling stories of those notorious old sea tigers and what wonderful adventures three brave boys met among them. These stories will be found exciting enough to please everyone, but above reproach, since there is not the slightest design shown to glorify the life of a buccaneer or pirate, but rather the reverse. They are the very best tales that money can buy, and we believe will receive a rousing welcome from boys.



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No. 29. NEW YORK, July 29, 1905. Price Five Cents.

Morgan's Coast Raider

OR,

THAD AT THE SACKING OF MARACAIBO.

By AN OLD SALT.

— From —
HAROLD J. GIESE
3422 North Robey Street
Chicago, Illinois

CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

Thad, Oliver and "Simple Simon," the three boy chums who set out to win renown and benefit humanity by capturing the notorious Captain Kidd, the most dreaded "scorcher of the seas," at the time New York was but a small town. Thad was the recognized leader of the valiant trio, and Simon very often proved to be not so very "simple" after all, since he possessed a bold heart, and was ready to risk much for the right.

Sir Harry Morgan, "The Red Scourge," the most famous pirate and buccaneer of history, who by his bloody excesses and the ingenuity, cruelty and daring of his piratical undertakings made his name one of dread and horror throughout the Atlantic.

Bat Grimshaw, Morgan's first officer, the degenerate son of an English nobleman, who becomes a second Dragon to our three boys.

Amasa Sprigg, of Vermont, one of Morgan's officers, and as vile as his chief.

Manuel Parks, one of Morgan's villainous followers.

Hawke Nelson, the Yankee skipper of the trader *Sea Fawn*, under whose flag the boys escape from Morgan.

Ruper Moss, who buys the governor's daughter and loses his bargain.

Don San Estacado, governor of Maracaibo, a cruel treacherous Spaniard, but at the same time a man of heroic bravery.

Kato, Don Estacado's body servant.

Emanuelo, the dumb man of Maracaibo.

Donna Paz, the governor's fair daughter, sold to Moss, captured by Morgan, and escaping both.

Muriel Claire, Morgan's fair English prisoner.

CHAPTER I.

BARGAINING FOR A BEAUTY.

The governor of Maracaibo was a little man of fifty, dark of eye and a typical Spaniard.

He ruled his city with an iron hand, and when he issued a command those whose duty it was to obey knew that if they did not carry the orders out to the letter a rope or the whip awaited them.

This man, San Estacado, was immensely rich.

He had a beautiful daughter, the Señorita Paz, and he wanted to get her off his hands by marrying her to a man of great wealth.

He was not very particular as to the antecedents of the bridegroom; all he asked was money, and, therefore, the girl did not have many suitors who were acceptable in the governor's eyes.

One bright morning San Estacado sat in his palace waiting for a person whom he had been expecting for ten days.

On the table lay a letter with the heavy seal broken, which he had read for the fortieth time.

This letter informed the governor of Maracaibo that the writer would call on him at a certain time, which the hands of the governor's watch were now indicating.

The writer was prompt to the very minute. The door leading to the governor's private chamber opened and a servant announced Señor Moss.

The man who entered was an Englishman.

He was a little past fifty, and fair to look upon. Nature had dealt kindly with him. But he had sensual lips and a pair of keen, gray eyes.

The governor rose and greeted his visitor profusely.

"Welcome to Maracaibo," cried Don Estacado.

"Many thanks, your excellency," was the reply, and the visitor was conducted to a chair.

"You have arrived on time," said the governor, with another glance at the open letter. "Shall I send for my daughter?"

"'Tis not necessary just now," was the answer. "I think we can conclude our part of the business without her. Have you spoken to the young lady?"

"The matter in question has been mentioned to her."

"And she——"

"She always bends to her father's will," returned the governor, hastily. "I have educated her to that end, señor."

"Good! An obedient child is one of the blessings of this world," smiled Rupert Moss, who was immensely wealthy. "I shall see the young lady later. You accept my offer?"

"Most assuredly, sir," the governor bowed. "I shall be pleased to bestow my daughter's hand upon so great a gentleman as yourself."

The Briton smiled again and took some papers from his pocket.

"I have drawn up the agreement," continued the Englishman. "I thought it best to write it in both English and Spanish."

He laid the document before the governor.

Don Estacado glanced over the writing and smiled his approval.

"It is in good form," said he. "Now, sir, when would you wish the ceremony to take place?"

"At the earliest possible moment. I have reason for this. I have learned that that prince of rascals, Sir Henry Morgan, is fitting out a fleet for a descent upon some of your towns again."

"We have heard those silly stories," said the governor. "We have heard them only to laugh at them. Maracaibo has been sacked, but not by this fellow; and he must know that the other pirates carried off everything worth taking."

"Then you give no credit to these stories?"

"I do not."

Rupert Moss took a letter from his pocket.

He opened it and laid it before the governor.

"Read that, your excellency," said he.

The governor did so, frowning once or twice, and then handed the document back.

"The writer fails to sign his name to his note of warning," he remarked.

"So he does," said Moss. "Perhaps he feared to sign his name."

"Think you this was written by some one whose knowledge of what he mentions comes first hand?"

"I have thought that he may be in possession of facts."

"In the first place, Sir Henry Morgan, buccaneer, would be the last man to divulge his secrets. He would never tell one who might send a note of warning. But why to you?"

"I have an idea that the writer may be some friend on board one of Morgan's vessels."

"Where did this letter reach you?"

The governor was now showing a good deal of anxiety.

"It reached me at Caracas."

"Mysteriously?"

"Well, yes."

"I see! It was sent in a strange way, so as to lend the more truth to it," laughed San Estacado.

"Well," said Moss, "if you do not put any faith in the warning we might as well call it false."

The official reached across the table and picked up the letter again.

This time he happened to hold it between the strong morning light and his eyes. He uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"This letter is written in part with invisible ink," said he.

"The deuce you say!" cried Moss. "I have heard of such things, but have never seen such a letter."

"Look for yourself, Señor Moss," was the reply, and the next moment the Englishman had the letter in his hand.

He turned and held it up to the window and for a little while looked searchingly at it.

"You are right!" he exclaimed. "I can see writing which is invisible except in a strong light."

He deciphered the following words:

"Be careful if you go to Maracaibo. There is a trap for you in the city. The governor is a crafty old fox who loves nothing but gold, and he is suspected of having sold out the city to the freebooters. Have your wits about you, whatever you do."

"It is nothing," said Moss, aloud, in as indifferent a tone as he could assume, transferring the letter to his pocket, much to the governor's chagrin. "It is the mere dribble of some idiot."

"I thought as much," was the answer, but at the same time the speaker would have given a dozen bright doubloons to have read the secret writing. "We have no fears of Sir Henry Morgan, and, what is more, we are prepared for him, should he come."

At this moment light footsteps came to the door and were going away, when the governor called out:

"Daughter! I should like to see you a moment."

The fairy-like footfalls came back, and the door swung open.

Into the room stepped a tall, beautiful girl of twenty, with sloe-black eyes and a carriage as graceful as her figure was perfect.

This was the governor's only child the Señorita Paz, a girl famous for leagues around Maracaibo.

At sight of Rupert Moss, who rose to greet her, she halted and looked covertly at her father.

"My child, this is the Englishman I have spoken about," said the governor, waving his hand toward his guest. "He has but just arrived, and——"

"I have had knowledge of his arrival," interrupted the

girl, in rich tones. "Indeed, I caught a glimpse of him as he entered the courtyard."

"Señorita, your attention honors me," and Moss bowed. "I am Rupert Moss, and this is my first visit to Maracaibo."

"You should have come before the town was sacked," said the girl. "The city has not quite recovered from the onslaught of the robbers of the sea, and it is said that they are going to pay us another visit, that Sir Henry Morgan, who sacked Porto Bello, is planning to attack us."

"I trust not, fair lady," said Moss. "He is an arrant villain, this sea wolf. He is a Welshman, I hear, and, from what I have learned of his deeds, he is a disgrace to his native isle."

"A black wolf who should be hunted down and hanged whenever found," cried the girl, as her dark eyes flashed. "Sir Henry Morgan is too vile to live. He kills all alike, and then he is a profaner of the sanctuary."

Moss rather liked the girl's spirit, but he saw that she had a temper which one might not fancy in a wife.

"Your father assures me that you are prepared to meet this ocean rogue, should he come," he said, addressing the fair one.

"I am sure of that," was the reply. "My father is rather boastful at times. We have some forts, but I do not believe they would resist Sir Henry very long."

"Tut! tut!" cried the governor, striking the table with his fist. "We can blow this man out of the water with our shore batteries and rake his land forces, should he attempt to steal upon us from the rear. Maracaibo, sir, is well defended, and, if you wish, I will show you how well we are armed for defense."

"I shall be pleased to see your preparations," said Moss. "One cannot be too well prepared for a rascal like Sir Henry Morgan. 'Tis said he has twenty ships——"

"What if he has a hundred?" shouted the governor. "The result would be the same."

At this the girl courtesied to the Englishman and turned to quit the chamber when her father's voice bade her remain.

"My child," said he, "you remember our last conversation?"

A flush stole over the fair face before him and heightened its owner's beauty.

"Yes," she said, dropping her eyelids.

"Well, this is the gentleman," and the governor pointed to his guest. "This is the Englishman who seeks your fair hand. I find him all that anyone can desire in a son-in-law, and——"

"But I do not know him," interrupted the girl. "I would like to know my future lord before I stand at the altar."

"Knowledge will come later on," cried the governor of Maracaibo. "When your father, child, vouches for your husband that should be enough. Think you not so?"

"I love my father," began Donna Paz, when her father stopped her with a gesture of irritation.

"We'll not discuss this mater," he exclaimed. "It has been settled——"

A flash lit up the depths of the beautiful Spaniard's eyes.

"Very well," said she. "I am the only child of Don Estacado."

She went to the door and laid her hand on the knob.

"Señor Moss will see you later," called out the governor. "Remember that he is a gentleman who will give you a palace and show you the world abroad."

She looked back at the two men, and a smile appeared on her lips.

In another moment she was gone, and the echo of her footsteps soon died away.

"What think you of my bird of paradise?" cried the governor as he turned to Moss.

"She is dazzling," was the reply. "She is fairer than my fancy painted her."

"There's not another as fair in this whole country! Her mother was a beauty, and she resembles her."

Moss was delighted.

"There is to be a payment before the wedding?" said San Estacado.

"Yes, ten thousand doubloons."

"And afterward——"

"As many more. You will find all this set forth in the paper," and Moss pointed to the document lying on the table.

"Good!" cried the governor. "We will now drink to the completion of our—bargain."

He rang for a servant.

The slim, yellow man who came in stopped at sight of Moss.

Moss lost color the moment he saw the man.

"Wine," said the governor. "Wine, and the best, Kato."

The Englishman stared at the door after the servant had departed.

"Where did you get that fellow?" he asked, looking at the Spaniard.

"He fell into my hands after a shipwreck off the coast," was the reply.

"He's a yellow nigger——"

"Yes. I could never get his history from him. He has always avoided giving it to me."

"He has the appearance of a likely man."

Before the governor could reply the slave came back with the wine and placed it on the table.

Moss watched him closely and noted his every movement.

Kato stepped back and covertly regarded the wooer.

As the Englishman took up his well-filled glass he caught the deep-set eyes of the slave, and some of the wine tipped over the rim.

It was a movement which Moss could not suppress.

"Curse the rascal!" he said, within himself. "He's the last man I wanted to meet in Maracaibo."

A slight smile came to Kato's lips.

He turned his head and looked away, but the grin grew broad and lingered long at the corners of his mouth.

CHAPTER II.

THE DREADED MORGAN COMES AGAIN.

Half an hour later Moss, the Englishman, came across Kato in one of the wide corridors of the palace.

Their eyes met and the wife hunter stepped quickly forward.

The yellow man grinned again, this time broader than before.

"Land sakes!" he cried, "what brought you to Maracaibo?"

"The most legitimate of errands."

"You should go away at once."

"Think you so?" cried Moss, with a show of anger. "Haven't I as good a right here as you have?"

"I won't argue that point," was the answer. "I'm here as the slave of his excellency, Don San, and my life is safe, but if they discover that you've been——"

"Hush!" cut in Moss. "You've got a voice like a fog horn. You'll have everyone listening about the palace, especially the girl."

"Aha! they've good ears here, too," cried Kato.

"When did you reach this place?" asked Moss.

"I was shipwrecked and therefore didn't come thither of my own volition. I was on board the buccaneer *Will-o'-the-Wisp,* which went down off the coast, and I drifted within reach of one of the Maracaibo traders, and here I am."

"And satisfied?"

"In a way, yes. I get good food and have light work, but it's not like the old life."

"Of course not. How rich is Don San?"

"I can't say. He has many good chests of doubloons and such treasure, but he wants more. In fact, that man would sell his child——"

Moss started.

"Have you come after her?" exclaimed Kato. "I suspect that you've heard of the beauty of Donna Paz."

"I have—long before I came thither."

"And you didn't find it exaggerated?"

"Not one whit."

"She's as good as she is beautiful, and there's no kinder heart in the city than hers."

"But her eyes can show a gleam of temper."

"Ay, sir. She has good eyes, too."

"Splendid! But has she no lovers?"

"Dozens of them," cried the slave. "She has them by the score."

"And is still heart whole?"

"Not quite, I fear."

At this the Englishman came closer to Kato and laid his hand on his arm.

"Who is my rival?" he asked, lowering his voice till it was almost a hiss.

"One Capt. Nelson."

"Not a Spaniard, then?"

"No, an American. He is the captain of a little trader that puts in here now and then."

"The deuce!" cried Moss. "When was he here last?"

"He's here now."

"In the city?"

"Yes."

"And his ship?"

"I think he came overland some distance, for Don San has forbid him come up with his vessel."

"Don San, as you call him, knows of the intrigue, then?"

"Yes. You can't keep anything from a man who has hundreds of paid spies, especially in a little place like Maracaibo."

"'Twould be difficult, that's a fact. Now, look here, Kato—I'll give you that name for the present—we used to agree fairly well."

"And disagree, too."

"Yes, but we stood by one another."

"We had to."

At this Moss smiled, and cast a swift look down the corridor.

"I've come here after the girl. I'm to buy her outright, and she is to become my wife."

"Of course. I told you the governor would see his child sacrificed for a lot of doubloons. He's a rascal, this governor is."

"He wouldn't be a Spaniard if he wasn't," cried Moss. "Now, Kato, I have received a letter warning me that Sir Henry Morgan contemplates a descent on the town."

"That is true."

"You know it, then?"

"I've known it for some time."

"But the governor, Don San, laughs at the idea."

"I know he does. The girl believes it, and so do some more of us."

"I want to marry Señorita Paz at once and get away from here. You'll help me, won't you?"

Kato nodded.

"In the same letter," continued Moss, "but in secret writing, I was told to look out for treachery while in Maracaibo."

"The town's full of it."

"But the governor is to be watched?"

"I wouldn't take my eyes off of him for a minute."

"Is he as bad as that?" cried Moss, paling a little.

"He doesn't know what honor is. He promised to sell you the girl?"

"Yes. It's a bargain. I am to have her for so much."

"And what does she say?"

"She didn't seem to object."

"Be not too sure," cried Kato. "You are not married yet."

Moss started and lost color again.

"The governor won't repudiate his bargain, will he?" he exclaimed. "By heavens! if he does I won't care a snap if Sir Henry Morgan does swoop down upon the town."

"Come with me," and the slave led Moss into a little chamber adjoining the one from which Moss had emerged after his conversation with Don San. "The governor is now having audience with Gen. Pablo, the commander of the Spanish forces in this district."

"In yon room?"

"Yes. Go over to the wall and listen. I'll be back presently."

With this the slave retired, leaving Moss alone in the high-ceiled apartment.

Hearing a hum of voices that seemed to come through one of the walls, Moss glided across the floor and applied his ear to the right spot.

Ten minutes later the door of the room opened and Kato came back.

The Englishman was standing in the middle of the room, his face dead-white, his hands clinched.

"Well, you heard?" said Kato.

"Yes. Your governor is the biggest rascal in Maracaibo!" cried the Briton.

"That is what I told you."

"I shall face him at once——"

"Not if you value your life," broke in the yellow man. "If you want to live keep a still tongue in your head and get out of this trap as soon as possible. You brought your wealth with you?"

"Yes."

"Leave it for Don San, and be glad to get away with your head."

"Curse him! I heard him tell the general that he has another fly in the web—a British fly, he called me—and said that I would be worth all their trouble."

"Last summer he had another wooer come to see him—a fool from France. Donna Paz was the bait. The fool never went back."

"What became of him?" eagerly questioned Moss.

"You will have to ask the secret dungeons of Maracaibo."

"The devil I will!" was the exclamation. "I'll kill this governor of yours."

"You would better leave that task for Sir Henry Morgan."

Moss began to pace the room excitedly.

"Where does the girl lodge?" he cried, stopping all at once in front of Kato.

"Where you can never steal her," was the reply. "Her American lover is the most likely to get possession of her, but you—pish! You couldn't get her if you had a million doubloons."

Moss' face, which had crimsoned, grew ashen again.

"So I am in a trap," he cried. "I am lured hither by this rascally governor. I am to be robbed and then consigned to the dungeons of Maracaibo. By heavens! I'll circumvent this plot."

"There is yet time. The night will be dark."

"You mean that I can escape?"

"Yes."

"I won't try it! I'll stay here till I humble these plotters or until Sir Henry Morgan sacks the city."

"He'll do that."

"Ha! you know that, then?"

"He's coming just as soon as his ships reach the rendezvous," said Kato.

"Are you in communication with Sir Henry?"

Kato winced and avoided Moss' gaze.

"You need not answer me," continued the Englishman. "Your look is quite enough."

Kato moved away and opened the door.

As Moss passed him the slave whispered at his ear:

"Keep cool. It's the wisest thing you can do. Upon your coolness depends everything."

With this the Englishman passed out and strolled from the palace.

When he reached the square of the city, where was a lofty flagstaff whence fluttered the banner of Spain, he caught sight of a group of Spaniards in earnest and excited talk.

Desiring to overhear what was being said, Moss approached, but the moment he was observed the voices were dropped a key and sly looks regarded him.

"He's an Englishman," he heard one of the group say. "Ten chances to one he's a spy for Sir Henry Morgan."

At this all eyes were turned upon Moss and he stepped back a pace.

"Make him confess!" said another voice. "If he is a spy or some one who cannot give a true account of himself we'll hang him to the flagstaff!"

Moss saw his danger, and his hand moved instantly to the sword he carried; and, as he was a good swordsman, he even hoped that the Spaniards would give him an opportunity to show his skill in that art.

In another second he was facing a crowd of desperate men.

They resembled nothing so much as a pack of wolves.

The Englishman did not draw till he found that but a few yards separated him from the foremost dark faces of the crowd.

"It is true that I'm an Englishman," said he, "but I am here with the consent of the governor, Don San, and I am no spy for Sir Henry Morgan nor for any other sea wolf."

"He lies!" roared out a big fellow with a red cap on his woolly head. "He belongs to Sir Henry Morgan's fleet and he's been sent here as a spy for his master."

With this they seemed to throw themselves forward, and the bright blade of the Briton glittered in the sun.

If he could have glanced behind him toward the governor's palace he would have seen a face at one of the windows and set in it two eyes that were watching the affair in the plaza.

"Stand back!" cried Moss. "I know how to use a sword, and if you force me I'll give some of you a passport to heaven. By my life! I don't intend to be overrun by the riffraff of your town. The first one who comes within reach of my blade will get the full benefit of it."

This did not disconcert the Spaniards in the least, for they made a dash at the Briton, and he kept his threat by thrusting the foremost through and through.

This was but the beginning of the *mêlée*.

Facing them bravely, Moss thrust right and left, knocking all sorts of weapons aside, and at last he reached the edge of the plaza, half a hundred dark-faced rascals before him.

He was giving blow for blow with all his strength and agility, and the track of the mob was marked with forms on the ground.

The millionaire Briton was a man of courage, and he held to his work with the zeal of one who deserves a better fate.

The issue of the conflict was not difficult to foresee, for no one came to Moss' assistance.

His face wore the hue of death, and his eyes flashed the fire of defiance as his blade wrought havoc among the bosoms of his enemies.

Suddenly the rapid gallop of a horse was heard.

On, on came the animal.

In another minute a red mare entered the plaza and fell headlong, while her rider pitched over her head.

Even Moss paused to witness this.

The rider of the mare, a young man, was on his feet in a jiffy, and glanced swiftly about the square.

Suddenly he caught sight of the palace and darted toward it.

He vanished inside, and the crowd in front of Moss seemed to forget him in curiosity about the rider of the red mare.

The Englishman did not put up his blade, but backed away, his blade on guard.

"If you rats want any more of it," said he, through his teeth, "you have but to hunt up Rupert Moss."

He had not gone far before he heard cries ringing on the breeze.

He paused, a smile at his lips.

"Morgan! Morgan, the buccaneer, is coming!" swelled on the air, and Moss looked wrathfully across the plaza.

"Let him come," he said to himself. "I've no reason to fear him."

CHAPTER III.

THE FAIR PRISONER OF THE "SEA LION."

Young Thaddeus Fergus stood on the quarter-deck of Sir Henry Morgan's flagship, *Sea Lion.*

Night was coming on. The blue surface of the sea presented a beautiful sight, for it seemed covered with ships.

These vessels were the pirate fleet consisting of ten vessels, all fighters and all under the command of Sir Henry himself.

Thad was not alone on deck.

Not far away stood the great captain of the flotilla scanning a young girl of English extraction.

Her name was Muriel Claire, and she was the child of an English lord who had lost his life in a recent encounter with Morgan.

The pirate had taken the girl prisoner, and she had been given the liberty of the ship.

Thad had become fairly well acquainted with her, and more than once had performed little favors which she greatly appreciated.

While Morgan observed the sea through his glass the girl made a slight gesture which Thad's keen eyes observed, and he went toward her.

"I hear it reported that this man, Sir Henry Morgan, is bound for some rich city which he intends to assault and add another infamy to his already detested name. Is this true?"

"I regret to say it is true," was the reply. "Sir Henry has been thinking of sacking Maracaibo."

"But the city has been once sacked, I believe."

"Yes, it has already felt the bloody hand of piracy."

"It is too bad," and Muriel sighed. "Is there no hope for the fair cities of the New World?"

"Not until the last of the pirates have been put down."

"Then may vengeance come swift and sure," cried Sir Henry's prisoner.

Morgan caught the words, and, dropping his glass, came toward the speaker.

"You do not seem to like my trade," he said, with one of his sinister smiles.

"Candidly, I do not," was the reply. "Your career has not been of the best, Sir Henry Morgan, and I hope and pray that you may abandon this nefarious calling."

"Miss, one must live. We are called the vultures of the wave, and, I am inclined to be equally candid with you, the name does not come amiss."

"You speak truly. Even now you are on your way to inflict wounds on the innocent——"

"Yes, on the innocent and bloodless Spaniard!" sneered Morgan.

The English girl turned her head away for a moment and looked at Thad.

"One of these days the hour of vengeance will come," she cried, speaking with emphasis.

"Oh, I've heard that prophecy before," and Morgan laughed. "We are now on our way to replenish our chests with gold. They have been depleted since our last expedition, and——"

"I cannot forget my father. He was a noble gentleman who would have died sooner than sail under a flag like the one that flies over this vessel."

"Yes. Doubtless Sir George Claire was a gentleman, but he gave us as poor a fight as any man I ever saw."

"What could one ship do against five?" exclaimed the girl, as she sprang up and stood before the pirate scourge with her eyes flashing and her bosom rising and falling like the swell of the sea.

"'Tis true we had five ships, and all wanted to go in, you know."

"Like a pack of wolves upon one poor lamb!"

"My dear young lady, you are not in the best of humor to-day," smiled Morgan.

A look of haughty contempt came into the girl's eyes, and she replied with spirit:

"That is the pirate's manner of fighting. Look now at your fleet—ten vessels to take some undefended town."

"Thad," cried Morgan, turning upon our hero, "take the young lady to her cabin. I am not in the humor to hear her just now. Besides, she has already given us a great deal of trouble, and I shall not humor her another hour."

Thad glanced at the fair prisoner and held out his hand.

Before Morgan could turn away she darted at him with a cry, and all saw a knife in her hand.

"I will take vengeance for my father and the others who have fallen by your bloody hand," she cried, at the top of her voice.

Thad and his chums stood spellbound, watching the knife descend toward Morgan's heart.

In another moment the girl fell back with a cry of horror and stared at the bladeless dagger she held in her hand.

The knife had broken off at the hilt, and the bloodless blade lay on the deck at her feet!

There came to Morgan's lips a grim smile, and he glanced at Grimshaw, his first officer, with a nod.

"Only cowards wear coats of mail!" exclaimed Muriel Claire, looking from the knife to Sir Henry Morgan. "There will come a day when your armor will not save your miserable life."

She cast the dagger hilt to the deck and turned to Thad.

"Take me away from that monster," she exclaimed. "Never let me look upon his face again till I can see it in death!"

Morgan looked after her as Thad escorted her to the main companionway, and then threw a glance in direction of Simon and Oliver.

"Now, Mr. Grimshaw, we'll attend to the other case. Which one did it, you say?"

"The one called Oliver. He threw a saucepan into Flimsy's face this morning and burned the poor fellow horribly."

Morgan beckoned Oliver forward, and Simon came with him.

"Have a care of the Dutch lad. He's dangerous," whispered Grimshaw.

"Not on my vessel," was the answer, as Oliver presented himself to the buccaneer.

"I am told that you threw a saucepan into a sailor's face this morning," said Morgan, with his accustomed sternness. "What have you to say?"

"It is true, sir," spoke up Oliver, boldly. "But I was greatly provoked. The man insulted the memory of my father——"

"Nothing of the kind, sir," broke in Grimshaw. "Flimsy is one of the meekest men in the lot and never says anything unless there is some reason for it."

"I can't have such actions on board any of my vessels,"

Morgan went on. "I will have to discipline you, young man. Call up the man, Mr. Grimshaw."

Grimshaw chuckled as he moved away, and presently came back with a dark-faced, sneaking-looking fellow who did not look like the meekest sailor on board.

"Jehu!" cried Simon, "that's the meek man, Sir Henry! He wouldn't take anything he can't carry off——"

"Now, sir," and Sir Henry addressed the sailor, "did this young man assault you?"

"He threw a hot saucepan in my face."

"What had you done?"

"Nothing."

"The Lord Harry! What a liar," broke out Simon, who could not content himself in silence.

"I'll order you in chains if you don't keep still!" thundered Morgan.

The Dutch boy did not reply to this, but looked at the sailor, who was determined to bring Oliver to punishment.

"So you hadn't misused him?"

"Hadn't said a word, captain."

"But he says you insulted the memory of his father," Flimsy threw up his hands.

"I never knew he had one!" he cried, at which the pirates standing near laughed boisterously.

"That will do," said Morgan. "Mr. Grimshaw, you will tie this young man to the mainmast and give him twenty good lashes on the naked back."

"When?" asked Grimshaw.

"Right away!"

Oliver began to divest himself of his outer clothing.

In less than three minutes after the command Oliver stood at the mainmast with a huge sailor holding the cat o' nine tails in his hand.

"That's justice with a vengeance," cried out Simon. "That dog yonder lied straight!"

Morgan turned to the Dutch lad and gave him a look of rage, after which he walked aft.

Just then Thad appeared on deck, and, seeing the group about the mast, came forward.

"What's all this?" he inquired.

The crowd opened a little and he caught the spirit of the scene at a single glance.

"Who ordered this?" he demanded.

"Sir Henry," roared out Grimshaw. "Be careful, youngster, if you don't come next."

Thad did not stop, but leaped forward and caught the executioner's arm in mid air.

"This is infamous!" he exclaimed. "Oliver never touched the man till he was terribly provoked."

"Silence!" cried the first officer. "Do your duty, Mr. Kent."

Kent, the executioner, lifted the lash again, but it never touched Oliver's back.

Thad made another leap for the arm, and in an instant he had wrenched the whip from the executioner's hand and flung it into the sea.

At this there came from Grimshaw's throat a cry like the roar of an angry lion.

"We'll break you for this!" he shouted, till he could be heard throughout the entire ship.

He was heard by the young girl who had lately been escorted below.

Muriel Claire came rushing on deck, and her wild cry was heard by all as she came forward.

"It's the girl—the little Briton!" growled Grimshaw. "By my life, I'll break her, too."

He bounded away and caught the girl's arm.

In another moment he was dragging her toward the mast.

"Untie the boy for the present," he cried. "We'll show this little chit how a 'cat' claws one's fair skin!"

Thad and his chums uttered cries of horror at these inhuman words, and the face of Muriel grew white as she saw the ropes that held Oliver taken from his limbs.

The thought that she was to be whipped chilled her blood.

"This is outrageous!" cried Thad. "I never saw anything like it on Capt. Kidd's vessel."

"We are not sailing under that dead man's flag," grunted Grimshaw.

"No, but you are under a flag just as black," was the retort. "Sir Henry Morgan will not countenance this."

"You'd better go below and ask him."

Thad turned away for this very purpose, when a scream welled from Muriel's heart, and she fell upon the deck in a faint.

"Now's the time," said the heartless Grimshaw. "Pick her up and lash her to the mast before she recovers."

Half a dozen rascals sprang forward to obey, when Thad turned and came at them like a young lion.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Let no one touch the girl without the captain's orders."

"I'm captain of the deck," said Grimshaw. "No man shall dispute my authority. I'm in command when Sir Henry is not on deck."

But Thad had thrown himself among the sailors, and with his chums, who had sprung to his side, he presented a naked cutlass to the sea wolves.

"This is rank mutiny," cried the first officer. "Pick the young thing up, men."

Thad and his friends stood their ground and put up such a front that none of the sailors ventured to take the risk of being slashed by the cutlasses of our young heroes.

Grimshaw stamped in his rage.

"You're a set of cowards!" he said. "I'll show you how to obey. I'll carry out my own commands."

He followed his last words with his favorite oath and stooped to pick Muriel up, when he got the flat of Thad's cutlass across his face.

He staggered back, flushed crimson, and shouted out all manner of epithets.

The boys, however, stood their ground.

Thad looked like a hero with the cutlass gripped in his right hand, while he glared at Grimshaw with undisguised hatred.

"Some other time! The captain's calling," suddenly said the first officer, as he turned away. "I'll not forget this, sir," he added to Thad. "I'll make you feel the power of Bat Grimshaw in the near future."

"Whenever you please, monster," replied Thad, calmly, as he lifted Muriel to her feet and assisted her to the companion way.

"Yes, the sooner the better!" chimed in Simple Simon.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH THE PIRATE IS FRIGHTENED.

Headed for Maracaibo, the fleet of the buccaneer sailed proudly on.

Muriel kept close to her cabin, though she expected at any time to feel the cruel lash of the monster of the sea.

Thad and his chums resolved to resist to the last the encroachments of Grimshaw, and as the days went on the fleet at last entered the Gulf of Maracaibo, completely fitted for the siege and capture of the town.

"There's something wrong on this vessel," growled Grimshaw to his captain one night, when he came in and found Morgan alone at his table.

"What now, Mr. Grimshaw?"

The first officer took a chair on the opposite side of the table and looked across it into Morgan's face.

"I can't just say, sir, but seems to me the ship is haunted."

"Tut, tut, man!" cried Morgan, breaking out into a laugh of derision. "That is impossible."

"But Sandy is accounted truthful, is he not?"

"What, Sandy, the Welshman? He's a fellow countryman of mine. I would believe him."

"Well, it's Sandy as says so."

"What does the man say?"

"He says that down in the forward part of the hold is a thing that appears at certain hours—a thing that looks human, but seems to be headless."

Another smile appeared at the mouth of Morgan, and for a moment he dropped his eyes to the papers before him.

"Have you investigated, Mr. Grimshaw?" asked the buccaneer.

"Not I! You know——"

"I thought you had passed that stage," broke in Morgan, as his face hardened.

"A man never does, I guess."

"We won't call Sandy up and get his testimony, but we'll do a little investigating ourselves. What hour has the ghost chosen for its walk?"

"About the hour of midnight."

Morgan glanced at the dial of his heavy gold timepiece.

"It lacks but ten minutes of the fateful hour now," said he. "Come, Grimshaw, we'll see this ghost."

Grimshaw followed Morgan with a good deal of reluctance.

The two proceeded down the ladder to the lower hold of the ship, where they soon found themselves in almost total darkness.

"Where does Sandy say the ghost walks?" queried the pirate captain.

"This is the very place," answered Grimshaw.

"Then we'll wait here," and Morgan shielded the light he had brought down in the little lanthorn. "Now, in the first place, Mr. Grimshaw, this ghost story is mere folly. There's no such thing as a ghost, and, if there were, brave men should not fear it."

"That's all right, captain," said the first officer. "Do you remember the specter we had for a passenger on board the old *Tempest?*"

"I recall the incident," said Morgan, in low tones.

"Well, you know we never got to the bottom of that mystery."

"Rats, I always thought," growled Morgan, who began to feel a little uneasy in that place. "We never did get really to the bottom of that, but——"

"Hist!" broke in Grimshaw, and Morgan became silent.

"What was it?" whispered the captain of the pirate fleet. "I heard nothing——"

"But that breath of chilly air that struck my face? Where did it come from?"

Morgan did not reply, but looked ahead while he felt Grimshaw come closer, like a man seeking protection.

"There it is again," whispered Grimshaw.

"What! the ghost?"

"No, the current of cold air."

"Pshaw! I'll have to reduce you, Mr. Grimshaw."

The next moment, however, Morgan shrank back against his first officer and gasped.

Grimshaw did not speak.

The face of the buccaneer had lost every vestige of color.

He fell against a beam and gripped the handle of the lanthorn.

Grimshaw looked ahead and saw a hazy sort of light as weird as the light of a jack-o'-lantern.

The man of many cruelties was frightened.

Sir Henry Morgan hugged the beam and looked at the strange thing that seemed to be bearing down upon him.

"Gods! 'tis the ghost!" whispered Grimshaw.

As for Morgan, he had not found his tongue.

In a few seconds the light seemed to move from them and then Sir Henry plucked up courage.

"Come," he said to his first officer, in a low whisper, "we will fathom this mystery while we're here. Ghost? Never! Such a thing never existed and one would not dare haunt Sir Henry Morgan's vessel."

Grimshaw went forward unwillingly at his master's heels.

Suddenly the strange light paused.

"Now," said Morgan, "now we will see what there is in this story of Sandy's."

The next instant the captain of the pirate fell against Grimshaw with a hoarse cry.

Grimshaw himself reeled against a stanchion and tried to speak, but the words seemed to die in his throat.

Morgan was gazing with terror-stricken eyes at an object that seemed to have emerged through solid planking, and now stood before them like a specter from the land of the dead.

The two pirates nearly fell over one another to get out of the strange being's path.

Morgan held up his lanthorn a moment; then, dropping it, turned and fled.

Knowing every part of the ship, he threaded his way down the devious windings of the passages, leaving Grimshaw to his fate.

He did not pause till he had reached his cabin, where he tore open the door of the sideboard and helped himself to a glass of strong liquor.

"It mystifies me!" he cried, throwing himself into a chair. "I never saw anything like it. It had the face of the woman who fought me like a tigress six months ago—the fair Andalusian whom I had to kill to escape death at her hands."

He paused for another swallow of the fiery rum, and then settled back in his chair again, still white of face and quivering in every limb.

"I wonder how Grimshaw fared?" he suddenly ex-

claimed. "I left him in the hold to take care of himself. I wonder if he got out?"

After a while his nerves seemed restored to their normal condition and he sprang to his feet.

"I'll go down and see what became of the ghost and Grimshaw," he muttered. "It was wrong to leave the poor rascal alone with that terror."

Morgan went back to the scene of his adventure.

The hold was now dark and silent.

Everything suggested the weird to his imagination, and he went reluctantly forward with the light in one hand and a cocked pistol in the other.

"He's not here," he said, pausing at last and looking around. "I can see nothing of Grimshaw. By heavens! what is this?"

Just then his foot struck something on the floor and he bent over it with another cry.

There lay Grimshaw doubled up on the floor, and Morgan's light fell upon his distorted face, dark as a mulatto's.

"What is it, Grimshaw?" cried the buccaneer. "By heavens! the thing must be flesh and blood."

Morgan bent closer over the inanimate form on the floor.

"There's been some foul play here," he said, under his breath. "I half believe we've mutineers on board."

Slowly Grimshaw revived and turned his eyes upon the face of his captain.

Morgan uttered a cry of joy when he saw that Grimshaw lived.

For a few moments Grimshaw's gaze was expressionless, but at last he recognized Morgan.

"What has happened, Mr. Grimshaw?"

"It was terrible, captain. I've sailed in all seas and in many ships, but I never felt a grip like that."

"Then it was flesh and blood?"

"What was, sir?"

"The object you called a ghost."

"It was not flesh and blood," cried Grimshaw, with emphasis. "No living thing has a grip like that. It was a hand as cold as ice, and it seemed to sink through my flesh like a knife."

"But the face——"

"I saw it for an instant only and then the hand seized me."

"Choking you, I suppose?"

"Sending me to the floor as though I had been felled with a marline spike."

"Whither did it go?"

"I didn't see it go anywhere."

"And its voice?"

"It was awful, captain," said Grimshaw. "It seemed to be a jargon of words. By my life! if the thing was flesh and blood I would say that it had no tongue."

"Pish!" cried Morgan.

"Of course, we always say that until we face these things," muttered Grimshaw, grimly. "Whenever we run across something we can't explain we sneer. But in this case, captain, I saw it and felt it and heard it."

"Well, say nothing to the men. We will go back."

Grimshaw was glad to get back to Morgan's cabin, where he could revive his courage with some fiery liquor. Morgan watched him from the chair at the table while he drank.

"You didn't try to hold the—the thing?" asked Morgan.

"Hold it? I could not have held a child after that hand touched me."

"You don't know how long you lay unconscious on the floor?"

"No, not exactly, but till you came. Your face was the first thing I recognized."

"It's strange," explained Morgan, reflectively. "I saw the light myself, but not the face."

Grimshaw was silent."

"What is that peeping from your bosom, Mr. Grimshaw?" cried Morgan, suddenly bending across the table and pointing a quivering finger at the breast of his first officer.

Grimshaw looked and his color fled.

"I—I—never—saw it before," he stammered.

"I didn't know you ever carried a keepsake in the form of a locket."

"I never did, captain."

"Then the—the ghost must have left it in your bosom."

Grimshaw drew from underneath his shirt something that was yellow and round, a little larger than a doubloon, but studded with gems that flashed brilliantly in the light of the candles.

"It's a locket!" he cried, dropping it on the table. "I vow to Heaven that I never owned a bauble like that."

Morgan, who had picked up the locket, fell to examining it closely while Grimshaw looked on in silence.

At last Morgan found the clasp and opened the golden case.

"What is it, captain?" asked Grimshaw, bending forward.

Morgan did not look up, but gazed at the face that had been brought to his view.

"What have you found?"

"This is the strangest part of the mystery," said the pirate captain. "She had a locket like this."

"She!" gasped Grimshaw, turning white again. "In the name of Heaven, captain, who is she?"

Morgan rose and paced the room.

"Mr. Grimshaw," said he, turning suddenly to his subordinate, "I can't fight such things as seems to be in the hold. I am Sir Henry Morgan, and have a reputation for courage, but this is more than I can defy. You will give orders to dismantle the ship. You will remove to other vessels in the fleet the stores and cannon of the *Sea Lion!*"

Grimshaw stared open-mouthed at the speaker.

"You will begin at once, Mr. Grimshaw. I will signal the *Catalan* at once."

"But, captain——"

"Say nothing to the crew about the thing in the hold. I will transfer my flag to the other ship. We can get along without the *Sea Lion*. If we were not so near the enemy we would burn her to-night. To-morrow we will sink her in the gulf."

Morgan came back to the table, and Grimshaw noticed that the locket of gold fell from his hand.

"Go and do your duty!" cried Morgan, looking suddenly into Grimshaw's face. "What are you standing there for, looking like a fool? You have sworn to obey me in everything without question. Now, sir, go and carry out my orders. Strip the *Sea Lion!*"

Grimshaw, still in doubt as to whether Sir Henry was sane or a raging lunatic, started for the door.

"Let the White Lady keep possession of the hold," called out Sir Henry. "Don't disturb her domain," and

ith this the pirate of the Caribbean snatched up the locket and tried to crush it in his hand.

"He's mad—mad!" cried Grimshaw, as he shut the door behind him and tramped down the passageway beyond.

CHAPTER V.

HOW THAD DESTROYED THE "SEA LION."

Everybody wondered when the *Catalan*, one of the largest ships in the buccaneer fleet, came alongside the *Sea Lion*, and Grimshaw announced the orders of the captain.

Men wanted to question the first officer, but he silenced with a look and the work went on.

The silver moon that rode the sky looked down upon this strange scene, and it was long after daylight when Grimshaw pronounced his task completed.

"What does it all mean?" queried Simple Simon, of Thad and Oliver, as they were about to quit the *Sea Lion's* deck.

"The captain is frightened at something," said Thad. "I saw him shiver when Grimshaw said something to him in low tones."

"It can't be that they think some ghost haunts the ship," returned Simon.

"I can think of nothing else," put in Oliver.

Muriel Claire, the English girl, was transfered to the *Catalan*, and Morgan witnessed from this vessel's deck the final work on the flagship.

"Now, Mr. Grimshaw," said the pirate king, "there's yet one thing to do."

"What is that?"

"I don't care to have that vessel following us."

"Not with her ghostly freight."

"That's it exactly. I want her sunk!"

Grimshaw turned away.

"Send some one over to fire her," continued Morgan. "You need not go yourself, for something might happen, you know, and your services are too valuable to be dispensed with."

The first officer thought for a moment.

"There's Thad," said he.

"The very person," exclaimed Morgan. "Send the youth over and have him fire the *Sea Lion.*"

This just suited the first officer.

He approached Thad, who still stood on deck with his chums.

"The captain commands you to go over and fire the *Sea Lion,*" said Grimshaw.

Thad started.

"She's to be burned, then?"

"Yes, sir! See that you do the work effectively. There must be no bungling. Off with you!"

The tones in which the last words were uttered brought a flush to Thad's cheeks, but he did not resent it.

"It's a dastardly trick of some kind," cried Simon. "I doubt if the orders come from the captain."

"Grimshaw would hardly issue such a command on his own responsibility," was the reply. "I'll carry out the orders."

The two vessels were not far apart.

Thad took a boat, and, accompanied by Oliver and Simon, put off for the *Sea Lion.*

The combined crews of the two ships watched the boys from the deck, and rigging, and saw them pull alongside the doomed galley.

Thad was the first to leap upon deck, and was followed by his chums.

"There's a mystery about this whole matter," said our young hero. "Sir Henry did not do this for nothing. The *Sea Lion* is an excellent vessel and is one of the best fighting galleys that ever parted the waters of the Caribbean."

"We may solve the mystery before we fire the ship," Oliver replied.

The three boys descended into the hold with their lanthorns.

"Nothing here," said Simon.

"If you will take notice, Simon, you will see that nothing down here has been touched. It would seem that Sir Henry was afraid to permit the plunderers of the *Sea Lion* in this place. If there is a mystery, it is here."

As Thad had been commanded to return in a short time to the *Catalan*, what they were to do had to be accomplished in a short space of time.

They ran through the hold, sending the light of their lanthorns in every direction.

Suddenly Simon, with a cry, stooped and picked up something which glittered on the floor.

"What's this?" he exclaimed.

Thad went at once to his side.

"It's a lady's ring!" said Thad. "Where did you find it?"

"Yonder."

The boys fell to examining the ring, which was a beautiful one, with a set of rubies from which peeped the head of a golden serpent.

They had never seen a ring like it.

"'Tis a strange place to find such a thing," cried Thad. "Down in the hold of the *Sea Lion,* too!"

"Perhaps it belonged to the ghost which frightened Sir Henry from his flagship."

The boys searched the vicinity with the greatest care.

"Nothing! We must now fire the ship," Thad said. "We can discover nothing here."

They went back on deck.

Combustibles were collected and the torch applied.

As a dense volume of smoke rolled over the rail of the galley the lads drew off and watched it.

Already the wind had swept the fire below deck, and they knew that the galley was doomed.

"Come, now," cried Thad. "We will get back to the *Catalan.*"

They ran to the ladder leading down to the boat rocking underneath the galley.

Thad was the first to spring into the boat, followed by Simon and Oliver, and as the last of the three landed in the bottom of the little craft our hero uttered a wild cry:

"Look! The ghost! the ghost of the *Sea Lion!*"

Simon and Oliver looked up and saw, leaning over the rail of the pirate vessel and surrounded by fire and smoke, a face, deathly white, but wonderfully fair.

All three boys gave vent to cries of astonishment and alarm, and Thad bounded to the ladder.

"Save her, Thad! save her!" cried out the Dutch boy, who followed at his heels.

But Thad was already halfway up the ladder, which swayed crazily and at last as the fire seemed to close round him, he dropped again upon the deck.

He looked around him, but saw nothing of the face.

"It is strange," he muttered. "We all saw it, and there can be no mistake."

Suddenly he caught sight of something at the main hatch and he darted thither.

It resembled a human face, and in another moment Thad was beneath the deck.

"I'll save you!" he called at the top of his voice. "If you will trust me ——"

A wild laugh seemed to come back to him.

He turned, half expecting to catch sight of the "ghost," but he saw nothing but the red tongues of fire.

"The ship is doomed!" cried Thad again. "She can't last but a short time. When the fire reaches the powder— "

He heard the laugh again, and, seeing a door just ahead, he dashed thither and forced it.

In another moment he held a woman in his arms.

She leaned heavily upon him, and Thad looked down into a fair face, white as death.

The eyes were open, but they did not seem to regard him, and the lips quivered as if in pain.

Thad turned and rushed up on deck.

He had not been gone long, but the fire had made terrible headway in the vessel.

Our hero bounded for the ladder, but a gust of flame forced him back.

Suddenly, with a cry, the White Lady fell from his arms and ran across the deck.

Thad would have bounded after her, but a whirlwind of fire swooped down upon him, and he drew back, shuddering.

Just then the voice of Simon, at the rail, rang in his ears.

"Come, if you would save yourself!" cried the Dutch boy. "The fire has nearly hemmed you in."

Thad saw that to attempt to follow the strange one would result in his own destruction, and turned away.

"This way," shouted Simon. "Be quick about it. Heavens! look up in the rigging!"

Thad looked up and saw something white fluttering above the deck.

"'Tis the ghost of the *Sea Lion!*" he said.

Simon started at the sight for a moment and cried out that they could not rescue her.

"She would not be saved," responded Thad. "I've tried that."

He cast another glance at the object in the rigging, and then threw himself over the side of the ship.

Down the ladder he went, his hands already badly burned, and when he dropped into the boat he gave orders for it to put off at once.

"Who was she?" asked Simon.

"That is the mystery," was the reply. "Capt. Morgan must have discovered her, hence the burning of the *Sea Lion.*"

"Grimshaw knew also."

"There's no doubt of that. Grimshaw shares a good many of the captain's secrets."

The boat was pulled from the blazing ship as fast as possible.

That part of the rigging in which the white figure had been last seen was now enveloped in clouds of smoke, and the boys could see nothing of the woman.

All at once, with a terrible roar, the *Sea Lion* seemed to part amid hips.

Masts and rigging sailed high in air and came down like great rockets into the sea.

The fire had reached the magazines of the ship and blown her up.

The whole sea appeared to quiver under the shock of the explosion, and some of the spars fell almost upon the deck of the *Catalan.*

Thad and his chums rowed back.

They landed on the *Catalan's* deck and looked around for Sir Henry, but that worthy was not to be seen.

Presently Grimshaw made his appearance.

He glowered the moment he noticed Thad, and came slouching forward like a bully.

"You came near staying on board till the very last," he growled.

Thad did not turn his eyes away.

"I tried to perform an act of kindness before I left," said he, watching Grimshaw closely.

"How so?"

"I tried to save a human life."

He saw the officer lose color.

"But you didn't, eh?"

"No, the person refused to be rescued."

Grimshaw walked away.

"Where's the captain?" queried Thad.

"Never mind the captain. You don't want to trouble him about what you saw on board the ship."

"What is it to you, sir?" said Thad, returning Grimshaw's words with a fearless look: "I have to report to the captain."

"But I say you shall not. I'll do that, sir."

Thad started toward the companion way, but Grimshaw interposed with an oath.

"If not now, some other time," said Thad. "It is my duty to report to the captain——"

Grimshaw made a gesture of impatience and then Thad caught sight of Morgan's head at the hatch.

"There's the captain, now!" he exclaimed.

Morgan heard the words and came toward Thad.

"Not a word about what you saw on the ship!" commanded Grimshaw, in low tones.

But Thad totally ignored the first officer, and advanced toward Morgan, whom he saluted as he halted.

"What is it, lad?" said the buccaneer, in low tones. "You carried out my orders, eh?"

"As you see, the *Sea Lion* is no more," and Thad waved his hand toward where the galley had lately rode the waters. "I fired her with my own hand."

"Good!"

"But, captain—— "

Thad hesitated, for Morgan's face had suddenly paled.

"This way, boy," said he, turning back toward the hatch. "Come with me to the cabin."

Grimshaw followed Thad with a furious look, but our hero did not notice it.

"Now," resumed Morgan, when he had shut the door of the cabin, "what did you see on board the *Sea Lion?*"

"Lieut. Grimshaw said I was not to tell you."

"Never mind that rascal. What did you see?"

Thad told his story in a few words. Morgan listened, never for a moment removing his eyes from his face.

"You did well in not saving her," said the buccaneer, at last. "I am glad of that. Accept this for my gratitude," and Morgan drew from his bosom a massive gold chain, which he threw over Thad's head, letting it rest on his bosom.

Thad shuddered as the chain touched him. He could not but ask himself what was that white lady to Sir Henry Morgan, the ruthless buccaneer?

CHAPTER VI.

THE DILEMMA OF DON SAN.

"Morgan! Morgan is coming!"

Such was the cry that rang through the streets of Maracaibo.

Those who heard ran to their dwellings or mounted to the roofs of their abodes and looked out to the distant harbor.

The astounding news was true.

They beheld the white sails of the buccaneer squadron; great birds they appeared on the ruffled surface of the sea.

Don San, the governor, stood at one of the windows of the palace and looked out upon this stirring scene.

There was a sinister smile at his lips, one that lingered there while he watched.

There was no doubt that this man stood ready to betray his people to the greatest buccaneer of the time.

His love for gold was such that he had offered to sell his child, Donna Paz, to the highest bidder, and he had accepted, as we have seen, the offer made by Rupert Moss, the Englishman.

But Moss had strangely disappeared.

The meditations of Don San were suddenly interrupted, for there came into the room a footstep, at sound of which he turned and stood face to face with a youngish man who wore the garb of the captain of a vessel.

A frown crossed the governor's face as he looked from underneath his heavy brows at his uninvited visitor.

The newcomer was Hawke Nelson, the American trader who had won the heart of Donna Paz.

Nelson was a fearless fellow who had followed the sea from childhood, and who made occasional trips to Maracaibo, where he found ready sale for the stuff his barque, the *Sea Fawn,* carried.

"What is all this confusion?" asked Don San, pretending that he had not understood the excitement on the streets.

"Morgan's fleet is in sight," answered Nelson. "The old buccaneer is nearing the city."

"What! the outlawed Morgan?" said the governor.

"The same."

"How many ships has he?"

"I have counted nine."

"Ha! not so great a number as has been rumored."

"But enough if we do not intend to fight him."

"So," smiled Don San. "Where is your vessel, captain?"

"In the harbor."

"She is not armed, I believe?"

"As a rule I do not carry arms, for my mission is a peaceful one. But if required I can fight a little."

The eyes of the American glowed while he spoke, and he cast a glance out of the window.

"Your people are not very willing to resist Morgan," continued the captain of the *Sea Fawn.*

"The cowards!"

"They recall the other sackings of the city, and these fill their hearts with fear. Now, Morgan is a great ra- cal——"

"But brave, withal."

"The most brutal animals are brave," said Nelson, with a sneer. "I think the city is capable of making a vigorous defense."

"What! against this sea robber? We are at his mercy."

The young captain started.

"Then you do not intend to resist Morgan?"

"Why resist? We have no vessels in the harbor——"

"But I thought your excellency has lately boasted that you had good guns on the forts and that you would resist Morgan to the death?"

A look of rage flared in Don San's eyes.

"I would have you understand," cried he, with feeling, "that I cannot take advice from a foreigner."

"As you will," said Nelson. "If you are going to make terms with Sir Henry Morgan you should do so now."

"Who spoke of terms?"

"I inferred——"

"One can infer what he pleases," interrupted the irate governor.

"I would think for the safety of your daughter——"

"The girl is able to take care of herself, sir."

"But still under her father's protection."

"What were you about to advise?"

"My vessel is one of the fleetest in these waters. If you are not going to resist and are determined to let Morgan sack the city, my ship is at your disposal. We can escape to——"

"Sir," cried Don San, "my daughter is the betrothed of Rupert Moss, the Englishman, who came but a short time ago."

Nelson smiled, although his brow was troubled.

"I am not here to argue love affairs," said he, looking at Don San. "I am here to advise you to escape if you do not intend to resist Morgan."

"In other words, you, a penniless trader, would like to get Donna Paz in your power?"

The American flushed and sprang forward.

In another moment his hands had fallen upon the governor's shoulders, and he was looking him squarely in the face.

"Penniless!" he echoed. "I am not a rich as some who come to buy your daughter. I own a swift, little trader and I carry on a legitimate business——"

"With whom?"

"Sometimes with your excellency."

"And at other times with the freebooters of the coasts?"

"'Tis true I sometimes trade with them, but I do it honestly," answered the young captain. "I haven't enough money to offer for your daughter, even if I cared to woo her in that maner. I despise the buyer."

"Come, sir. You are reflecting upon my honor!" growled out Don San, turning again to the window and throwing a glance toward the water.

"If you have sold your child to this man, Moss, you've placed her in purgatory, from which——"

"You don't know Rupert Moss?"

"I know enough!" was the reply. "This man has no honor, though he is brave, for he fought the mob down on the streets with the courage of a lion."

"He comes of good family."

"But you say he is missing."

"Keeping out of the way of the mob, perhaps."

"Now, your excellency, since you will not accept my

proposition will you not consent to letting Dona Paz go in the *Sea Fawn* to Gibraltar?"

"With you, sir?"

"Why not?"

"No!" And Don San stamped the floor. "My child remains here and shares the fortunes of her father!"

"Very well," and Hawke Nelson drew back. "Out yonder ride the ships of Sir Henry Morgan, the notorious, the vile. You can stay and make terms with him if that suits your fancy. The *Sea Fawn* is going to get out of the way."

"I forbid your vessel going!" cried Don San. "I am governor of Maracaibo."

"And I command the *Sea Fawn!*" exclaimed Nelson. "You can't hold me back."

"By my soul! I'll sink your vessel with the guns of the forts."

"If you dare," hissed the American trader, "that might be a game two can play at."

"Your ship is now under my cannon."

"Granted. She may not remain there long. Don San, you're a coward, every inch of you. I doubt not you are expecting to betray the city into the hands of the buccaneers. What became of the French fool who came here some time ago with a donkey load of napoleons to buy your daughter for his wife? Answer me if you dare. He never left the city and you have lost some new napoleons at the gambling hells of Maracaibo."

Don San turned white.

"By my life! and that is sacred to me, I'll have you drawn and quartered in the plaza!" he roared.

The American kept his temper admirably.

"That is something you will never do," he said, through clinched teeth. "You may be governor of Maracaibo, but you can't enforce all your commands."

"Rascal!" cried Don San.

"Just as many epithets as you please," laughed Nelson. "Sir Henry Morgan has said that he will never treat with Don San, governor of Maracaibo."

"He has said nothing of the kind."

"Think you so?"

Nelson dived one hand into a deep pocket and brought from its depths a document which looked quite important, since it was sealed with a large red seal.

"Here is the proof. You may recognize this document before I open it," he continued, with a glance at the official.

"It looks like Morgan's seal."

"'Tis nothing else."

"When did you get it? Ha! you are in league with Sir Henry."

"No, but I came through his sea lines the other day, and in answer to an inquiry of mine, as I thought he might become a customer, he sent me this document."

Don San took it eagerly from Nelson's outstretched hand.

"The last paragraph will interest you most," observed the young American.

The eyes of the governor dropped to the writing and he read for a moment in silence.

Then he started and flung the paper toward Nelson.

He had read as follows:

"As to the Spanish cur, Don San of Maracaibo, I hope to hang him up by the heels on his own plaza one of these days. This miser in official robes shall never treat with me. I shall show this mangy cur what Sir Henry Morgan thinks of him, and I trust it will not be long ere I can have this satisfaction."

"What say you now?" asked the American.

"The sea robber is a liar!" cried Don San.

"Yet you will remain and fight him?"

"I am resolved on one point—that none of my family will acept the hospitality of the captain of the *Sea Fawn.*"

Nelson pocketed the paper and went toward the door.

"Good luck to you, governor," he said, looking back as he laid his hand on the knob. "As Sir Henry more than intimates, your precious heels may some day be higher than your head."

At this a furious oath burst from Don San's lips, and he rushed toward the young captain with hatred in his eyes.

"Get out, dog!" he roared.

"As you will, señor," bowed Nelson. "Remain and feel the hand of Morgan."

The American captain stalked through the corridors of the palace and out into the garden.

In another moment he was walking hurriedly toward the harbor where the *Sea Fawn* lay.

"He will die as the fool dieth," he said to himself. "Let him perish, then!"

Suddenly some one crossed Nelson's path.

"'Tis Moss!" cried the American.

Moss did not overhear the ejaculation, for he was in a great hurry.

"What sort of town is this?" he demanded, bursting suddenly in upon Don San. "Here I am attacked by a mob of rapscallions in the streets and have to fight for my life. Besides this, my trunks have been broken open at the inn and stripped of every farthing."

Don San affected surprise and indignation.

"What sort of robber roost do you govern?" went on the maddened Englishman.

"Honest men, sir."

"I'll give you a doubloon for every one you find for me."

"Well, sir?" exclaimed Don San.

"Morgan is coming, sir, and we will all be killed unless we make some terms with him."

"Terms?"

"Yes; 'tis not dishonorable. I know Sir Henry——"

"You know him, eh? Thank fortune," and Don San sprang to Moss' side. "You are a Godsend. How well do you know Sir Henry Morgan?"

"Well enough, I think, to save us on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That I am married at once to Donna Paz."

Don San grasped at the straw.

"'Tis settled, then," he cried. "We will have the priest at once. I'll send for Kato first——"

He struck the call bell on the table and the yellow servant appeared.

"Donna Paz and the priest at the chapel on the knoll," he commanded.

Kato was gone ten minutes.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Don San, as he turned upon the youth when he came in.

"Fra Anselmo has already fled the city, and Donna Paz is aboard the American's ship in the harbor!"

The rage of Don San was terrible to behold.

"There's one way of stopping the ship," he cried, rush-

ing toward the door. "We can hold her under the guns of the fort."

"I fear not, your excellency."

"Why not, dog?"

"Because the soldiers are fleeing and the guns have been spiked."

The governor of Maracaibo stood like a man in a maze.

"Let Sir Henry Morgan come, the dog!" he cried. "I will trick him as he has never been tricked before. Maracaibo shall be his last victim. Come, Señor Moss. We'll send this sea wolf and his men to perdition in the twinkling of an eye and all unshriven!"

CHAPTER VII.

THAD STARTS ON A DEADLY MISSION.

The loss of the *Sea Lion* diminished to some extent the fighting powers of Morgan's fleet.

He had still enough vessels to attack Maracaibo, once or twice pillaged by men of his stamp, and he approached the town with a great display of force.

It was the middle of the day when the vessels came in sight of the city.

Morgan stood on the deck of the *Catalan,* his sea glass in hand, and gazed upon the scene before him.

There was a smile of certain triumph on his face, and he seemed in excellent humor.

He believed he had gotten rid of the White Lady, and that she would trouble him no more.

Grimshaw stood near his master.

The ire of the first officer had not abated one jot toward Thad and his companions.

The boys had not made themselves conspicuous since the sinking of the *Sea Lion,* and Thad still wore the chain which had been placed around his neck by the buccaneer.

All at once a boat was seen coming toward the *Catalan,* and Morgan gave orders to let it approach unmolested.

He thought it came from Don San, who might want to surrender Maracaibo without a battle.

The boat contained three men, one of quite distinguished appearance.

"By my life!" suddenly cried Morgan, "I ought to know that face. I have seen it before now, but where?"

"I cannot place the man," said Grimshaw.

As the boat rounded to and came under the bows of the *Catalan,* Morgan gave vent to an exclamation of surprise.

"I have him now!" said he. "'Tis my old friend, Moss."

The boat did contain Rupert Moss, the Englishman, and as he climbed upon the pirate's deck he held out his hand to Morgan.

"We have not met for some years, admiral," exclaimed Moss. "I did not expect to greet you in this part of the world."

"Nor I you," answered Morgan. "The last time we met was in London."

Moss bowed and suddenly raised his eyes.

The buccaneer, understanding the glance, beckoned the Briton to follow and he led the way to his cabin.

"Now, what brings you to me?" queried the captain of the pirate fleet. "Something extraordinary, I've no doubt. You come from Maracaibo?"

"Yes, but not from Don San, the governor."

"Ha! no? What is that fellow going to do?"

"He has abandoned the city."

Morgan started.

"How! abandoned the town?" he cried. "I thought I would get the opportunity of hanging him up by his heels on the plaza. But you say he has run away?"

"That he has."

"And taken with him all the treasure?"

"I doubt not the old city is still good plucking," answered Moss. "Don San did not take all of it away."

"That is good. Then we will not have any trouble for our pains. Stap me, but I thought this boastful fellow would remain and fight."

Moss looked round the luxurious cabin a moment and turned back to the man at the table.

"The forts are well armed, but the guns are spiked," said he.

"Who did that?"

"The soldiers, before they ran away and left their governor in the lurch."

"Then mine is to be a bloodless victory! But wait, my dear Moss. I will find something for my men to do. The people are in hiding in the adjacent country, and we will hunt them down and bring all to terms. No doubt the rascals have buried gold and jewels under the churches, and we'll make them divulge the hiding place of every bit of plate and every doubloon."

"By the way, admiral," said Moss, lowering his voice a trifle, "as I came on deck I saw three lads standing together. Are they the young fellows who once took service under Capt. Kidd?"

"The same. How came you to know that they once served on board the *Red Raven?*"

"Not so very long ago I assisted at the last rites of a scoundrel who had served with Kidd, and he told me the whole story of that fellow's sea roving. Among other things he talked about three boys who enlisted under Kidd's flag—near New York, I think—and afterward became noted."

"I have them with me now," smiled Morgan. "They are good enough boys as boys go on board a ship, but they are very independent and give my officers a good deal of annoyance. But I will soon get rid of them, for in the next assault I shall place them in the front rank, in hopes that the balls of the enemy will deprive me of their forced service."

"A good idea!" cried Moss. "I know they gave Kidd no end of trouble, and I would advise you to get rid of them as soon as possible."

Nodding acquiescence, Morgan rose and crossed the room.

"My dear Moss," said he, "how fair is this daughter of my old friend, Don San? I have heard a good deal about her——"

"She's pretty, but she has a temper," broke in the Englishman. "Come, admiral, you can't do anything in that quarter, for the girl belongs to me."

"To you? What do you mean?" cried the buccaneer. "I had thought of making love to her, but since you have her I shall have to forego that pleasure unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you'll trade."

Moss looked amazed.

"Trade for whom?" cried he.

"For the damsel I have on board the *Catalan.*"

"What! have you picked up another sea wife?"

"Not exactly that, but the girl is pretty, and, like your sweetheart of the palace, she possesses a temper. She is a Claire. Perchance you have heard of her father, Lord Claire?"

"Not that person?" exclaimed Moss. "I used to hobnob with her father and I think I recall the daughter. I can't trade, for an American rascal has taken Donna Paz on board his ship and is doubtless on the way to Gibraltar by this time."

"If so, we'll catch him!" cried Morgan. "For Gibraltar is our next point. We'll catch this American and his prize, and, of course, turn the girl over to you."

"Thanks, admiral," smiled Moss. "I have paid ten thousand doubloons for the beauty——"

"Bought her outright, eh?"

"Yes. I was to pay that much more, but some one broke open my chests in the city and stripped me."

"By order of Don San, no doubt."

"I think so. He is a great rogue, and if you ever get a chance to hang him up by the heels let me know when the ceremony is to take place, and you shall have another spectator."

At this juncture a sailor made his appearance and announced that the flag had been pulled down from one of the forts that commanded the bay.

"That looks like surrender," said Morgan.

"Doubtless Don San left a few people in the city, and they will naturally want to make terms with you. But be careful. Look out for a trick."

"What sort of trick?"

"I cannot say, but Don San declared in my last interview with him that he would show you a trick of which you had never heard, and I suspect treachery."

The fleet was now near Maracaibo, but no sign of life was visible. No one appeared on the ramparts of the forts, and not a person could be seen from the ships.

But the flag had been lowered from the main fort, and this signified capitulation.

Morgan, warned by Moss' words, prepared to take possession of the town.

It was his intention to sack it, and then to hunt the inhabitants whom he suspected had taken to the jungles back of the town.

He gave orders for some of his best men to go ashore and he placed himself at their head.

When the party reached the wharf Morgan leaped from the foremost boat and planted his standard in the street.

Watchful, examining every possible hiding place, at the head of his company, he made his way through the deserted streets.

At last he caught sight of a face peering over some rubbish in one corner of the plaza, and he ordered its owner to come forth.

Out crept an old man, who shivered when he found himself face to face with the renowned buccaneer.

"Where's your governor?" demanded Morgan.

The old man shook his head.

"Come, dog! Bark!" roared Morgan, whipping out his sword and holding it against the citizen's breast. "You needn't shake your head, for you've a tongue——"

The old man put his finger to his mouth, which he opened for Morgan's inspection.

"Holy mother! the wretch is tongueless!" said the buccaneer, drawing back with a shudder.

"But he understands," said Moss, who was at Morgan's side.

"That he does, and he may know how to write."

The pirate chief drew a tablet of ivory from his bosom and wrote on it with a sharp, soft stone.

The citizen nodded and took the ivory from the buccaneer's hand.

"The forts are deserted," he wrote.

"Who pulled down the flag?"

"I did."

"Your name?"

"Emanuelo."

"Well, Emanuelo," smiled Morgan, "you will conduct us to the main fort and show us what your master has left for us."

The old wretch started back and color left his face.

"That means something," said Morgan, with a glance at Moss. "He turned pale."

"It is treachery, admiral."

"I doubt it not. We shall see," and he turned again to the Maracaiban.

"You have been left behind to carry out the governor's plot," he hissed. "Come with us."

The old man fell on his knees and clasped his hands.

"Stand back there, men," cried Morgan to his followers. "There is treachery afoot. No doubt this rascally governor has undermined the forts——"

"I have heard it rumored that all have been mined for some time," interrupted Moss.

"Forward, then, with caution. Advance your ranks, Mr. Grimshaw. Send some of your bravest men ahead and let them enter the fort. If there is a fuse——"

Just then some men who had strayed off in direction of the main fort, came running back with frightened faces.

Morgan turned on them with an oath.

"What is it now?" he demanded.

"The fuse! the fuse!" they cried, in unison.

Even Morgan for a moment turned pale.

"Just as I suspected," said Rupert Moss. "This is in keeping with Don San's character. He has undermined the forts for our destruction."

"The fuse must be stamped out!" shouted the buccaneer. "We shall circumvent this rascal. But first let me attend to this old spy." And the next moment the sword of Morgan had pierced the body of the tongueless man, and the old wretch fell dead at his feet. "Now forward to the fort!"

All at once Grimshaw ran to Morgan's side and whispereded at his ear.

"A good idea!" cried the pirate. "Where are the lads?"

"Yonder," and Grimshaw pointed toward Thad and his friends.

"One's enough," said Morgan. "Bring me Thad."

Grimshaw hurried away and soon came back accompanied by our hero.

Morgan looked at the youth a moment and then said, sternly:

"The main fort yonder is undermined and a fuse is burning in it."

"The work of the governor, think you, sir?"

"Yes, 'tis Don San's rascality. If the fuse is not stamped out we shall be blown to atoms."

Thad did not reply to this.

"You will find the fuse and save the fort and your com

poisons as well," continued the buccaneer after a short pause. "It's a dangerous mission."

Thad grated his teeth and looked at the captain of the pirate fleet.

If Grimshaw expected to see him show fear he was disappointed.

Thad's nerves did not quiver.

He looked straight into Morgan's eyes, and said, calmly:

"I'll do what I can, sir."

The buccaneer saw the youth dart toward the fort and turned a white face toward Grimshaw and Moss.

"The boy has courage," said he.

"Yes," sneered Grimshaw. "He is in the same boat with us. That is the reason."

CHAPTER VIII.

THAD MEETS THE THREE SISTERS IN BLACK.

The main gate of the fort was not far away.

Thad made his way toward it and kept his courage up for the ordeal he felt at hand.

He doubted not that Morgan had some definite information concerning the trick of the governor's, and he knew that should the fuse ignite the stores of powder in the fort, the whole city would be laid in ruins.

When he found himself on his way to the fort he looked on either side for enemies.

A strange silence overhung the streets, and the sun seemed to retire behind a cloud so as not to witness the terrible destruction of human life that would follow the explosion.

Thad gained the fort and ran under the stone arch of the low door.

No one greeted him.

He had seen forts like it before, notably those of Porto Bello, and was fairly familiar with such structures.

Beyond the door he paused a moment, and then started down a darkish corridor toward the magazines, for the powder houses of the Spanish forts of that day were nearly all situated alike.

Sword in hand, lest he should meet anyone, Thad kept on and at last found his way barred by a small, low door.

This he opened without difficulty.

He started back the next moment with a cry of alarm, for the door had swung shut and a click told him that he was a prisoner in the little chamber!

Thad stood a moment in the middle of the room and then moved toward the door.

"Stay, señor," cried a shrill voice behind him, and he turned to confront three figures in deep, black robes.

He drew back a step and gripped the hilt of his sword firmly.

He knew he stood face to face with three nuns—tall, dark-eyed women, who looked like black giantesses.

"What is it?" demanded Thad.

One of the three advanced and put out a long hand.

"Is it true that Morgan has come?" she asked.

"Morgan is out yonder," cried Thad. "Where is the burning fuse?"

At this the nuns looked at one another, but did not reply.

"I can't remain here," Thad went on. "I am on urgent duty. I must find the fuse Don San left burning for our destruction. Where is it?"

The same silence answered him.

"By my life! you shall let me go," shouted Thad. "I shall not remain here. I want to find the fuse—the death fuse in the fort."

Suddenly one of the nuns cleared the space between them with the agility of a tigress.

Thad was thrown off his guard by the abruptness of her leap.

The boy was caught by the throat and thrown violently against the wall, whereupon the other two nuns came forward and all held him a captive.

The boy could only look into the blazing eyes of the trio and wonder what would happen next.

He was wholly in their power, and their hands held him in a grip of steel, from which there was no escape.

He had been in tight places before, but never in the grip of three mad nuns.

Their eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire as they regarded him, and his sword was forced from his grasp.

As the weapon clattered on the stone one of the women picked it up and fell to admiring the hilt.

She passed it to one of her companions, who took it from her hand and suddenly thrust the point of it against Thad's throat.

"The señor wants to see the fuse," cried she. "He has come to find it for Sir Henry Morgan. Let him find it, sisters of the night."

"That's what I want to do—find the fuse," cried Thad.

He was jerked from the wall and dragged across the room into another that adjoined it.

Through this, in turn, he went down a narrow corridor, which was damp and foul smelling.

"Is the magazine underground?" asked Thad.

"The little señor shall see."

"The sooner the better if I am to stamp out the fuse."

At this all three laughed, and Thad was brought up before a door which one of the nuns opened with a key, and he was dragged across a room beyond.

"Ah! I see," said the boy to himself. "This is the way to the magazines. I know how they were found in Porto Bello, and it's the same way here."

The nuns stopped suddenly.

A hood was thrown over Thad's face, and a pair of strings brought round under his chin.

He was now blindfolded.

There was hardly any necessity for this, for the way was dark enough and as devious as the windings of a labyrinth.

The hood nearly suffocated the lad.

"Make haste and get to your journey's end," he called out. "This is very uncomfortable and I want to find the fuse."

"The little señor shall find it," came in answer from apparently far away, though he knew it had been spoken by one of the black-clad sisters.

The journey ended abruptly.

Thad was brought up against another wall, the hood torn from his head, and he was told to look round.

The chamber in which he now found himself was tolerably well lighted.

Thad saw first that the black nuns were still his companions, but as he noticed this a rope was thrown round his body and his arms were pinioned to his side.

This was done so quickly that he had no time to resist, and he was thrown to the floor.

"What means all this?" he cried, looking up into the faces of the nuns. "Sir Henry Morgan will avenge my death if I die here. He won't leave one stone on another in Maracaibo."

"What care the sisters?" was the answer. "Sir Henry is a monster who has sinned so often in the sight of God that his time has come."

"But you have regard for your own lives?"

"Not when the sea wolf comes," broke in one of the women. "We have given our lives to the destruction of this robber of the sea. He is to perish in Maracaibo!"

"How?"

In answer to this one of the nuns dropped to the floor and opened a little trap.

In another instant she dragged into the light something that at first resembled a snake, but Thad's keen eyes made it out to be a fuse such as those used at that time to blow up ships and forts.

The woman handling it cast a rapid glance of triumph toward Thad and laid the thing almost at his feet.

It reached down into the opening, but how far it ran in the darkness he could not see.

"This is the fuse!" cried the nun. "The little señor sees the doom of himself and Sir Henry Morgan!"

"But it does not burn."

The nun reached up and took the lamp from its bracket on the wall.

She deliberately applied the flame to the end of the fuse and then placed it on the floor.

Thad seemed to have forgotten what fear was.

"How long will it burn?" he asked, coolly.

"Ten minutes."

"And you?"

"We shall show Sir Henry another fuse which will prove to him that the way hither is safe. He will rush in with his men and then the deadly thing will go off."

"Vipers!" hissed Thad. "I never heard of anything so diabolical as this."

He could not take his eyes from the sputtering fuse on the floor.

"Now, señor, we will fasten you to the ring in the wall yonder. You will be away from the fuse, and it can burn undisturbed. We dare not leave you here bound and not fastened to the wall. You would contrive to reach the fire and save your master."

Thad was taken across the chamber and fastened to an iron ring set in the solid masonry of the wall.

He could offer no resistance.

He was in the hands of these black-gowned creatures, and they were determined to encompass the destruction of Morgan and his men.

It did not take long to secure our hero to the iron ring and when this had been done the three nuns drew back to the door.

"We will leave the light on the wall," said one, looking at Thad. "The little señor can see the words written by the last prisoner if he will look sharp. It was a buccaneer, one of those wild robbers of the coast who dared to offend Don San.

Thad's answer was a look, and he saw the door shut between him and the nuns; he was alone with the deadly thing, hissing, reptile-like, on the floor.

The boy's blood ran cold in his veins.

He could move but little.

The ring in the wall was as unmovable as the will of Sir Henry Morgan, and he could not stir beyond a certain limit.

With his utmost efforts he could not reach the burning fuse, and he appeared to count the seconds when it would drop below the level of the floor and then——

He shuddered when he thought of the outcome.

Doomed to die, he could only watch the flashing fuse as the particles of powder leaped up from its tow in little sparks.

He heard nothing of the three nuns.

What was Morgan doing? And Simon and Oliver? Would they attempt to rescue him?

All at once one of the square stones that formed the wall opposite him began to move.

Thad saw it and noticed that it turned outward as if on a pivot moved by some unseen machinery.

He now had something to watch beside the deadly fuse.

Some one was on the other side of the wall, but whether friend or foe he did not know.

The stone moved quite beyond the wall until it seemed to hang suspended in mid air.

Suddenly a face appeared in the aperture.

Thad's heart gave leaps for joy in his bosom.

Then something was pushed through the hole, not large enough to admit of the passage of a human body, until Thad could see it.

He started and his lips met firmly, but in rage.

It was the face of the head nun.

Thad looked twice before he fully recognized it, and then he leaned toward it as far as he could.

The sallow chin rested on the stone, and the cold eyes regarded him without a gleam of pity.

"She's come back to see me die and to die with me," thought the boy.

Not a word fell from the nun's lips.

Thad questioned her, railed at her and then begged for mercy, something he had seldom done in his adventurous life.

All the answer he received was the stare of the coal-black eyes which for a moment dropped to the fuse burning on the floor.

"Where are your sisters?" finally asked Thad.

Then for the first time the lips parted.

"They have lured Sir Henry Morgan within the fort!"

"Heavens! Have you no hope of mercy?"

"Yes. For Morgan there is none."

Thad twisted himself as far from the iron ring as he could, and saw the eyes in the opening change a trifle.

"Does the señor care to die?" asked the lips.

"Not I!" cried Thad, grasping at the hope he thought hidden in the sentence.

"It is too late! The little señor should not have joined Sir Henry Morgan."

Our young hero retreated to the ring again.

He heard sounds that seemed to come from some distant part of the old fort.

"The birds are in the trap!" said the lips of the nun. "The vultures have flocked to their doom. Look at the fuse, boy! It burns near the opening now. When it drops out of sight it will burn faster, and then the powder —the magazine!"

Thad gave a great tug at his cords, but they were like bonds of steel.

He might as well have tried to break through a rope of iron.

Slowly the face in the opening withdrew.

It faded from his vision like the face of a dream, and the last thing he saw was the smile that came to the lips and rendered them more pronounced than ever.

The stone swung slowly back to its place.

When it had reached a certain point a hand came through the opening, a long hand, unjeweled and dark, and one finger pointed directly at Thad's face.

"In three minutes!" said a solemn voice.

That was all; the hand faded from view, and the stone fell back into its appointed place.

Thad looked once more at the sparkling death on the stone floor of his prison.

Then he noticed another thing.

The lamp on the wall was slowly going out.

Even as he looked it went out and he was wrapped in darkness save where the fuse told him death was at work.

"If I could get away for a second—no, for a tenth part of a second!" he cried. "Three minutes? Oh, the tigresses in black! What fate has selected me for a death like this?"

He sprang the length of his tether, only to fall back against the cold ring in the wall.

The sparks flashed up at the end of the fuse, and then, as Thad watched it, it dropped out of sight and the room where he was became as dark as Egypt.

He held his breath and waited for his fate.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE POISONED WINE.

But the doom did not come.

Thad, who had closed his eyes, opened them to find the chamber still in darkness and over all a silence like that of the tomb.

At last the stillness vanished and he heard the murmur of voices.

Yet he could not stir beyond the length of the cords that fastened him to the unyielding ring.

"What a plot it was!" said a voice that seemed to come from beneath him. "If Sir Henry catches Don San he will wish he had never been born."

Thad started and uttered a cry of joy.

The voice was Simon's!

He called to the Dutch boy at the top of his voice and heard Simon answer him.

In another moment a head was thrust up through the opening in the floor, a head which Thad could not see for the gloom that prevailed, but he was soon relieved by the glimmer of a lanthorn.

"'Tis Thad, Oll!" cried the Dutch boy, as he scrambled up into the chamber of the fuse. "I've found Thad!"

It did not take long for the two young rescuers to set Thad free, and then, in a few sentences, they told him how they had entered the fort with Morgan and his men.

"It's a terrible place," said Simon. "Don San must be a monster, for he has cells in this fort and in each is the skeleton of some poor wretch."

"His time will come."

"And soon, if he has not escaped on a vessel."

Having escaped death by the fuse, Morgan and his men began to sack the city.

They discovered that the inhabitants had fled into the jungle, but the buccaneer chief gave orders to pursue them like wild beasts and bring all before him.

Every house was looted by the buccaneers.

The night that settled down on the city was dark and stormy.

The fleet of pirate vessels hugged the shore and the wind blew a heavy gale.

Morgan issued commands to find, if possible, the three nuns who had nearly brought to naught the whole expedition.

Thad and his chums continued to look through the streets, not so much to sack the houses as to find and relieve any poor wretch who occupied some dark cell by command of Don San.

The nuns apparently had escaped.

All at once the three boys heard loud shouts from one of the largest houses in the city, not far from the bay.

"Some of our men carousing," said Thad. "Perhaps they are torturing some poor prisoner who has fallen into their hands——"

The boys drew nearer.

Thad entered the garden attached to the house and tried to look inside.

A large tree stood near the structure, and one of its branches stretched toward one of the upper casements.

Eager to see what he could, Thad climbed the tree and wormed his way out along the limb.

He reached the window and leaned eagerly forward.

He looked into a large room where a table stood.

Around this table stood or sat a group of Morgan's ruffians headed by the terrible Grimshaw.

They had broken into the cellar attached to the house and brought up a quantity of wine.

This had just been done.

Thad saw Grimshaw break the neck of a bottle and hold it above his head.

"Here's to our king and captain, Sir Henry Morgan!" cried the first officer of the *Catalan*. "May he rule the sea and become the great sea admiral of his time."

This sentiment was greeted with wild shouts, and the others seized bottles and followed Grimshaw's example.

"What fiends!" thought Thad, while he looked on. "If the powers could only come upon them now there would be a lot of choice souls for Tartarus."

Grimshaw leaped upon the table and executed a wild, piratical dance to the cheers of his companions.

Up and down the table went this monster of wickedness, his jests and oaths ringing out in wild time to his steps.

It was a scene calculated to steel Thad's heart against the pirate and his ways.

"Open the bottles with the yellow seals," suddenly cried Grimshaw. "We'll taste that wine. It may be of some choicer vintage and older than that which has already renewed our youth."

The suggestion was cheered to the echo, and some one began to break the necks of the dozen bottles indicated by the freebooter.

One handed a bottle up to Grimshaw.

"What if these rascals have poisoned their wine?" said some one.

"Ho, no danger of that. They like it too well to spoil it in that manner."

Grimshaw stooped and took the bottle handed forward, while several of the commoner men put their bottles to their lips and took deep draughts.

Suddenly one threw his bottle to the floor and reeled across the room.

Then another and another followed him, till at least six lay on the floor writhing in the most awful agony.

Grimshaw lowered his bottle and became white.

"Shake those rascals, Mr. Sprigg," he called out.

Amasa Sprigg, a Yankee, ran to the nearest fellow and pulled at his collar.

"He's dead, captain!" he said, looking up at Grimshaw.

The first officer sprang from the table.

"Dead?" he cried.

"Poisoned!"

"Heavens! they did poison the wine, then. This is the Spaniard's vengeance."

Six men lay on the floor dead, and others were gasping for life in the same room.

"We dare not tell the captain this," said Grimshaw, as he turned away. "We came out against his orders, you know. Let's fire the nest!"

"And roast the dead?"

"Yes. Swear the others to secrecy first."

The living men were called round the table and made to take a terrible oath not to reveal the adventure of the night, then Grimshaw and his companions began to pile the costly furniture of the house over the dead, and one at last ignited the pile.

All this was witnessed by Thad, as he lay on the limb of the tree.

He saw the fire take on life and watched Grimshaw as he looked at it, flaming with passion.

All at once there rushed into the room a pirate with a young girl in his arms.

Grimshaw started at the sight and burst out into a wild curse.

"Where did you get that beauty?" he cried.

The drunken pirate grinned.

The girl was in a dead faint in his arms.

"'Tis the governor's daughter," he said. 'Tis the belle of old Maracaibo."

"No," cried Grimshaw. "She is said to have escaped on board a ship commanded by an American."

"But the storm, captain," persisted the sailor. "A ship has been driven ashore, and I found this lady out in the street bewildered and looking for Don San's palace."

Grimshaw darted toward the man, who drew back with his prize.

In another moment the sailor had backed against the wall, his face revealed in all its brutishness by the fire just starting in the room of the dead.

"She'll do for the captain," said Grimshaw.

"Which means that if she falls into your hands she'll never see the captain," was the answer.

The sailor was determined to fight for his prize.

Grimshaw continued to advance.

"Hand her to me!" he commanded. "She's the great prize of the place and as such belongs to Sir Henry."

"Take her if you can!"

Grimshaw threw a hasty look at Sprigg, and the Yankee drew back a pace.

"She's not the governor's daughter, but some lower-class girl," said the first officer.

"Look at this necklace at her throat. Think you a lower-class girl would wear a bauble like that?"

"Marry me, but it's a gem!" cried Grimshaw.

"And, of course, that establishes her parentage. She was found by me, Manuel Panks, of old Hampshire, and I shall keep what I've found."

There were still half a dozen pirates in the room who had not fallen victims to the poisoned wine.

These stood near the door watching the two men—Grimshaw and the common seaman.

Suddenly a glance passed between Grimshaw and these men.

They bounded forward and fell like lions upon Parks.

The girl was torn from his arms and he was dealt a blow that knocked him into the fire.

Donna Paz was tossed over to Grimshaw, who deftly caught her and threw a contemptuous glance at the half-dazed man in the blaze.

"Out of the nest now, men," cried Grimshaw. "This old trap is doomed. Remember your oath!"

All sprang for the door, but suddenly Grimshaw, with the girl in his arms, came back and bent over Manuel Parks' body.

The others were fleeing from the place.

As the first officer reached forward to rob the man he had had flung into the fire, Thad thrust his pistol into the room.

The lips of the boy hero were closely clinched and he held a steady weapon.

"Your days are numbered, monster!" he cried, as he pressed the trigger, and at the report Grimshaw dropped Donna Paz and reeled back, falling on his face at the opposite side of the room.

Thad burst into the room through the casement and snatched the girl from the floor.

In another moment he had turned and was on the narrow sill of the window again.

Despite his burden, he managed to climb out on the limb, and after calling to his chums he was enabled to drop the girl into their arms.

"Where did you get her?" cried the astonished Simon, looking into Thad's face.

"Up yonder, thanks to Grimshaw," was the reply. "Now be off."

The three ran away and reached a secluded spot, where they discovered that the young girl had recovered from her swoon.

"Into whose hands have I fallen?" asked the maiden.

"Not into those of Grimshaw," said Thad. "We belong to Sir Henry Morgan, but you will find us merciful."

"There can be no mercy where that sea robber reigns."

"Try us, miss," put in Simon. "I guess we're not cannibals. and, as for being rascals, we're pretty near that sometimes, seeing that we must obey the man we do."

The girl looked into the Dutch boy's face a moment and then put out her hands.

"I thought I was free," said she. "I was on the *Sea Fawn,* but the storm drove us back. I wonder if the captain perished?"

"It's quite likely," said Thad. "Who is the captain?"

"Hawke Nelson; he is the captain of the *Sea Fawn.*"

"He's American, is he not?"

"He is and a most chivalrous man."

"We've heard of him. Now, if you can walk and guide us we will try to take you to some place of safety."

"Is the whole city in Morgan's hands?"

"It is all his."

"And the forts? They were mined——"

"They've rendered the mines worthless."

Donna Paz's countenance fell at this announcement.

"There is a little secret place near here," she said, looking round. "It is a little place under the convent——"

"To it, then," interrupted Thad. "If we can save you from the hands of Morgan, our master, we will do so."

The governor's daughter seemed to have recovered her usual strength and spirits, and started off bidding the boys follow her.

"This is the place," she said at last, pausing in a flower-bordered garden, which was backed by one of the little convents of Maracaibo.

She parted some of the dense shrubbery and led the way to a flight of steps, down which she sprang.

"Ah! here is the door," she cried.

Thad, who had followed closely, heard the opening of a door, and the next moment they had followed Donna Paz into a little chamber, which was dark.

"Who's there?" said a voice in the gloom.

All halted and the boys drew back, laying their hands on their weapons.

"Friend or foe?" said the same voice.

The girl uttered a cry.

"Close the door!" she exclaimed. "Father, if they find you you are doomed!"

The inmate of the retreat was Don San, the governor, himself.

CHAPTER X.

HOW HOPES ROSE AND FELL.

Thad closed the door and all stood in the thick gloom that prevailed in the retreat.

Outside everything seemed quiet, but it was the quiet that precedes the bursting of the storm.

Thad proposed that he and his chums go back to the captain, so as not to excite suspicion by their absence.

He was quite sure that Grimshaw, even if he had not been fatally wounded in the house, did not suspect him.

Don San and his child bade them farewell, saying that they would remain where they were till Morgan left the city, for they did not doubt that he would soon depart, as the richer place of Gibraltar, on the lake, invited him with its spoil.

"The vengeance of Heaven is in store for this robber of the coasts," cried Don San. "One of these days I will lead a fleet against Sir Henry Morgan——"

"Not so long as you run away when you have good forts," put in Simple Simon.

"But I had a trap set in the forts."

"The fuses?"

"Si, señor."

"Sir Henry found them out and saved his army."

"Satan must have protected his own," grated Don San. "I have my child with me again and now I can face any peril."

The three boys slipped from the retreat and started off toward the shipping in the harbor.

Some of the pirates had gone back to the vessels, while others were carousing in the city, and Morgan and Moss, the Englishman, were drinking in the house of Don San.

"Don San may take a notion to sneak back to-night," said Morgan to his companion, as he paused at his wine. "There's no telling what this son of Spain may do. He may have some secret hiding places for his treasures which have so far escaped our eyes, but he knows where they are."

"I wish he would fetch his fair child back," laughed Moss. "She belongs to me."

"Of course, since you made the first payment on her," grinned the buccaneer. "She's yours, Mr. Moss, no matter where you find her."

"And no man shall take her from me!" and the hand of the Englishman smote the table. "I'm not a fool like the Frenchman was who bought the girl but hadn't the courage to maintain his rights."

"What became of him?"

"I doubt not you'll find him in one of the governor's secret dungeons."

Morgan seemed to reflect a moment.

"Where are those secret places?" he queried.

"Dash me if I know, exactly. There may be some under this very palace——"

"We'll see," and Morgan leaped to his feet. "Come, Mr. Moss, we'll take a look through this hole."

He caught up the lamp from the table and the two started off.

"You've been here before, eh?" he said, with a glance over his shoulder at his companion.

"Only once or twice."

"We'll find the dungeons under the palace. By the way, what's become of the yellow nigger, Kato?"

"I guess he went with the herd of the Maracaibo beasts," smiled Moss. "At least, I haven't seen him since a short time after my interview and bargain with Don San."

"Well, here's a door."

Morgan kicked on a door at the foot of a flight of stone steps, and it flew open.

"Looks a little like the trail to the dungeons of his excellency," he continued. "Keep at my heels, my dear Moss, and if you see a pair of eyes which you think belong to an enemy give them a bit of cold steel. You've got your sword, eh?"

"I'm never without it," answered the Englishman. "And I fancy I know how to use a little cold steel like this."

The two advanced down a narrow passageway which seemed to lead them underneath the palace.

Morgan carried the lamp and Moss followed at his heels with his naked sword gripped firmly in his eager hand.

"Ho! what's this?" suddenly exclaimed the buccaneer. "By my ocean troths! 'tis a dead woman on the flags. And a nun at that!"

"Perhaps it may be one of the three nuns who bound Thad," said Moss.

Morgan lowered the light and turned the form over.

The face was pale and drawn, and as he and Moss gazed into the white face under the somber hood they drew back and Morgan crossed himself.

"One of the three beyond a doubt," said he. "She must have killed herself. I see no wound, though."

Just then something fell from the nun's half-open hand and Moss fell back against the wall with a terrified cry.

"Look! The snake did it!"

Morgan swooped the light near the flags, and it fell upon a little reddish object that wriggled away over the stones.

"They kill themselves with the coral snake in this part of the world," said he, in low whispers. "But a nun to do this of all things! Where are the other two?"

"Here, monster!"

Morgan whirled at sound of the voice which came from behind him and saw two dark figures against the opposite wall.

"The other death birds," he cried. "Here they are, Moss. We've found them at last."

"And at last, Sir Henry Morgan!"

The pirate of the Caribbean looked first at the speaker and then again at his companion.

Something clanged behind him like the closing of an iron door, and he looked over his shoulder, nearly dropping the light.

A door had shut behind him and the two nuns stood back of it, gazing at him through a round aperture in the center of the portal.

"The dungeons of Don San," said one of the black-robed sisters. "Hast thou been looking for them, monster?"

"What boots that to you?" cried Morgan, who had set the lamp on the stones and drawn his sword.

"You have found them to your sorrow."

Morgan lunged at the face beyond the portal.

"Open the door!" cried he.

"The judgment will open it," was the answer.

The Englishman had fallen against the damp wall, his face pallid as a shroud and his eyes bulging from their sockets.

His blade seemed about to drop from his hand.

"Harry my soul, but this is unfortunate," said Morgan, to his comrade. "The men won't think of looking for us here!"

"When they find you you will not be able ever to tread again the deck of a pirate ship."

Morgan rushed toward the hole in the door, but the face withdrew, though he could still regard the deep-set eyes that spat fire like the orbs of a wild cat.

"Good-night, Sir Henry Morgan," said the same rasping voice. "This is the end of your wicked career. This is the last of the buccaneer of the seas. No more will you hear the winds play through your sails nor listen to the shrieks of your victims!"

"Liar! witch!" roared Morgan, as he suddenly drew a pistol and fired through the opening.

"I trust that found your brain, hag of the nether world! Come, Mr. Moss——"

Moss did not stir.

He was deprived of power by the situation and the man who had fought back a mob by his own good blade was appalled by the sight of an iron door.

Morgan heard footsteps recede beyond the portal.

He was immured in a cell beneath the governor's palace.

If he could have followed the two nuns he would have had still bitterer thoughts.

But he did not see these two creatures with compressed lips and pitiless eyes ascend to the upper stories of the palace and pile furniture and other inflammable material on the main floor.

The nuns worked hard.

They cared for works of art only as fuel.

They threw costly silks on the heap, old documents and everything else that promised to help in the doom of the palace.

When they had finished they lit the whole with a torch.

For a few moments they looked upon their work and then hastened away.

They knew that the fire would soon be seen.

Perchance the governor himself in hiding would witness the destruction of his palace while he cowered in the fringe of light, fearful lest the blaze of his burning home would reveal him to Sir Henry Morgan.

But it was not to be so.

"Look! another fire!" cried Thad, as he raced toward the harbor with Simon and Oliver.

"It's the governor palace!" said the Dutch boy. "If I'm not mistaken that's about the spot it stood."

"Some of our men must have fired it," replied Thad. "They are fiends to-night."

Higher and higher leaped the flames.

Suddenly a figure dashed past the boys.

"Come!" cried this person. "'Tis the governor's palace and the captain is there!"

The speaker was Grimshaw, and Thad gazed after the man as though he had risen from the dead.

"Follow him," cried out Simon. "If the captain is there and helpless we may rescue him. Better under Morgan's eye than under Grimshaw's 'cat.'"

"Right you are, Simon," and Thad sprang to the Dutch boy's side. "Save the captain if you can!"

By this time many had seen the fire, and the report that the palace was burning reached the ships in the harbor.

Those pirates who had not been permitted to take part in the loot as yet did not wait for orders, but bounded away and raced for the burning pile.

The palace was a large and magnificent structure that had escaped the former sackings, and it burned like a tinder box.

A man who stood on the shore some distance from the pirate fleet saw the wild light.

"Morgan's work no doubt," said he through hard set teeth. "This monster will come to the end of his tether one of these days. I've lost Donna Paz; she's probably at the bottom of the lake, but I don't owe Morgan anything. The *Sea Fawn* is a thing of the past, but I'm not yet ruined. I know some good little vessels that can be had for a song or a little strategy, and so long as my name's Hawke Nelson I'll not lack for a ship."

This man watched the light till it began to die down.

Grimshaw had raced through some of the lower rooms of the palace calling aloud for his commander, but no voice had answered him.

"Perhaps he went back to the vessel before the fire," cried the first officer at last. "I'd like to know who robbed me of the girl—the lovely Donna Paz. By Jove! it was a narrow escape, for, when I came to, the whole room was on fire, and some one dragged me out just in the nick of time."

Grimshaw called off the men who had been attracted to the fire and went to the *Catalan.*

"Where's your captain?" he demanded of the first man he met.

"He hasn't been back since he went ashore."

Grimshaw stared at the man like one in a maze.

"The thunder he hasn't!" cried the wretch. "Have I become captain of the pirate fleet at last? This is my day and the fleet is to my liking. Now I will make the name of Grimshaw as famous as the name of Morgan. Captain of the pirate squadron!"

He laughed to himself, chuckling aloud as he moved in the direction of the town.

He had at last reached the height of his ambition.

The governor's house was a mass of smoldering ruins, and but few tongues of flame leaped where its timbers had stood for years.

He turned in that direction as if some strange fate were driving him.

Grimshaw was alone.

"Captain of the fleet!" he said again, for the title delighted him. "I'll be a greater man than Sir Henry Morgan. I'll make the kings of the world pay tribute. I'll be the red scourge of the sea, and my flag shall be—let me see—ho! in the name of the saints, what's this?"

He had nearly fallen over something at the edge of the ruins.

It looked like a man, and then——"

Grimshaw gripped the hilt of his sword and stooped over the object.

"The master!" he cried. "What! is this wreck Sir Henry Morgan? His beard is burned away and his eyes——"

"To the ship!" came from the man on the ground. "You're not yet captain of the fleet, Mr. Grimshaw!"

Grimshaw felt his blood run cold.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW THAD FOUGHT IN THE CATHEDRAL.

Grimshaw could hardly believe that this blackened and disfigured object on the ground was the handsome Morgan.

However, accustomed to obey his captain at the word, he lifted the begrimed form and carried it away.

Morgan cursed everything from Don San to the men under his command.

He was taken on board the *Catalan* and his injuries attended to.

He told how some one had fired the palace and how he and Moss, the Englishman, had found themselves in a cell underground, shut in by the two nuns.

After terrible sufferings they had managed to escape from their prison and had escaped through the fire.

What had become of Moss, Sir Henry did not know.

Doubtless that worthy had perished, and Morgan expressed no pity when he spoke of the Briton's fate.

In truth, this monster had pity for no one.

He gave orders that Maracaibo should be searched again as he believed that it still concealed somewhere Don San and the nuns.

The rage of the buccaneer was terrible to behold.

"Now," said Thad to his chums, "we must save Donna Paz if we can. If she falls into the hands of Morgan she will be put to the most terrible tortures. I care not so much for the fate of her father, for Don San is a demon."

"Morgan seems to want the nuns most," remarked Simon.

"Yes, and if he finds them I tremble for them."

The three boys made their way through the desolate streets of the town, looking everywhere for some poor unfortunate who might have escaped the eye of the pirate.

A number of the inhabitants had been brought in from the outlying region and imprisoned in one of the churches.

This was Morgan's usual mode of treating his victims previous to putting them to death.

The church was almost filled with the unfortunates.

As the boys drew near it they heard cries and groans which led them to the steps of the building.

A door stood a trifle ajar.

Thad ventured to peer in, and the sight that met his gaze remained with him to his dying day.

The half-drunken buccaneers had entered the church and were making sport of the sufferings of the unfortunate people.

They were trying to extort ransom from some, while others were under torture in order to make them reveal the hiding places of their riches.

"This is the work of fiends!" exclaimed our hero as his eyes flashed. "Surely the day of reckoning cannot be long delayed."

He entered the church and paused horrified at the sight.

Not far off stood Sprigg, the brutal Yankee, trying to force a confession from a young girl.

The villain had her by the throat and was forcing her against the altar while he threatened her in the most blasphemous language, if she did not confess where she had buried her jewels he would run her through with his sword.

"This is too much!" cried Thad.

In another moment he sprang forward, and his hand fell like a sledge hammer on Amasa Sprigg's shoulder.

The pirate turned with an oath.

"What is this to you, meddler?" he exclaimed, laying his hand on his sword hilt.

"We are not all brutes," said Thad, calmly, looking the man in the eye. "There are times when we can afford to be merciful——"

"But these hounds have buried their riches and would conceal it——"

"Can you blame them? They live under the shadow of the buccaneer ships."

"But we are masters in the city now. And they shall deliver up."

"Shame!" cried Thad. "You are an American, sir."

"I foreswore all my love to the colonies long ago," was the answer. "I like this trade."

"And you're just fitted for it."

"I never served an apprenticeship with Capt. Kidd."

"Who was your better," said Thad. "Kidd had moments of kindness, but you—you have none. You are callous to everything good—a brute and a rascal!"

"Beware, youth! Because you serve under Sir Henry Morgan think not that it exempts you from the sword of Amasa Sprigg."

Thad drew off a pace and exclaimed:

"I understand your meaning, sir. You shall not maltreat the young señorita."

"She belongs to me."

His eyes blazed with baffled rage.

"Then so be it," cried he, and the next moment he had thrown his prisoner from him and his sword leaped from its scabbard.

"Just as you please, sir."

"This is a holy place for a fight," grinned the Yankee. "I will show you that the sword of Amasa Sprigg is just as potent in a church as on the ship's deck."

Simon and Oliver had come forward, and the pirates, seeing what had happened, formed a little ring, leaving the poor unfortunate prisoner huddled breathless on the outside.

Thad had drawn his sword and held it ready for the lunge indicated by the glitter of Sprigg's eye.

"Stand back, men!" called out the buccaneer. "This is a countryman of mine, but that does not free him from my blade. I'll make short work of the interloper and show him that there is one man whom he cannot ride over."

This was greeted with shouts of approval from the buccaneers, but Thad showed no alarm.

It was a strange place for a duel, the splendors of the old sanctuary were around them, and the vestments of the holy altar shone in the warm light.

Sprigg, eager to finish his work as soon as possible, delivered a swift pass which Thad deftly parried, and the next moment the ring of two good blades was heard within the walls.

Thad had never before seen such a display of swordsmanship on the Yankee's part.

Amasa Sprigg had taken good lessons somewhere, for he knew how to handle a blade.

The excitement was intense.

The living ring about the duelists grew still and looked on amazed.

Simon and Oliver stood back with their hands on their sword hilts and watched the battle.

At last, by a sudden thrust which Thad could not parry, the blade of Sprigg's weapon penetrated his arm and his sword fell from his hand.

The crowd set up a cry at this.

But quick as a flash the blade was recovered and Thad again stood ready for a renewal of the conflict.

"Winged, eh?" sneered Sprigg. "I'll cut your crop next time!"

Thad made no reply to this.

Maddened by his failure to pierce Thad's breast the pirate lunged and thrust fiercely.

He was not aware that in doing this he was giving his young antagonist a decided advantage.

All at once the time came.

Thad saw his chance, and his sword, darting forward, executed one of his best maneuvers, and Sprigg was forced to the edge of the human ring.

It was Thad's chance.

For the time he had the pirate at his mercy.

Sprigg's lips were glued together, and his eyes flashed back at Thad their old fire.

The spectators held their breath.

Suddenly out leaped the blade of young Thad, and the next moment its shining point vanished in Sprigg's bosom.

There was a cry and the Yankee reeled backward, dropping his sword on the stones.

As Thad withdrew his point the pirates set up a fierce cry and moved forward.

The Yankee lay on the stones, but they sprang over him, and Thad and his chums found themselves faced by as mad a pack of man-wolves as ever raged for blood.

The three boys drew together.

"Revenge!" shouted the buccaneers. "Death to the young Jonahs of the fleet!"

The youths said nothing, but their faces showed that they would not retreat far.

"We defy you!" said the looks they gave the pirates.

They backed down one of the aisles, facing the mob of buccaneers with the courage of heroes.

"Down with the scum of the ships!" shouted the maddened men. "Kill the young rats of the sea! Kill the spawn of goodness!"

Weapons were lowered as the boys still backed away, seeking good fighting ground where the aisle was wider.

In another moment steel met steel, and the boys had all they could do to defend themselves.

The tigers of the sea were furious.

Their cries were loud and terrible, and their visages looked more like the visages of a pack of demons than human beings.

All at once the young girl whom Thad had rescued from Sprigg's power leaped up and threw herself between the combatants.

She was not spared; a sword pierced her through, and the wild men of the sea came on.

The murder of the girl enraged our boys.

They sprang at the enemy and drove them back.

The blows they delivered could not be parried by the monsters, and soon Thad and his chums stood free.

The battle lulled for a moment.

The boys knew it was but a breathing spell and prepared for it.

The door of the church now stood wide.

Beyond lay the warm sunlight of the tropics.

It came into the cathedral and brightened the dark place, showing the poor, frightened inhabitants on the floor, some in silent prayer, others too stupefied to breathe.

"At them now!" cried the leader of the horde. "Sir Henry will promote the men who rid him of the young scum of the ocean. Kill the little terrors!"

Again the flood of passion surged toward Thad and his comrades.

In another second the boys were again in a desperate battle for life.

They beat down the swords of the wild men, but they came up and forward again.

Thad stood his ground alongside of Simon and Oliver.

"Down with the monsters of the sea!" shouted the Dutch lad, encouragingly.

"Kill the Dutch dog!"

"Down with the murderers of the Caribbean!"

Thad went down on his knees in the wild rush.

In another instant he was up again, presenting a splendid front to the foe.

At this moment a loud voice was heard at the door of the cathedral.

"Ho, there, wolves!" it cried. "Fighting among yourselves? There's something for you to do out here. We've found the governor."

The swords of the wild men dropped.

The boys thought of Donna Paz, whom they had left with her father in the retreat beneath the convent.

The voice at the door was the voice of Grimshaw.

"Come out!" he cried. "No fighting among yourselves. The captain is nearly dead, and I am in command."

There was a last fierce look at Thad and his chums, and the pirates rushed away.

Some one picked up Amasa Sprigg and dragged him down the aisle.

The wounded wretch was filling the air with his blasphemies, but the pirates laughed at them.

"If they've found Don San," said Thad, "they must have captured the girl as well."

Then the three boys, with another glance around, fell in behind the buccaneers and moved toward the open door.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BUCCANEER AND HIS PRISONER.

On board the *Catalan,* in the cabin of Morgan, who lay on a couch with his face bandaged, stood Don San, the governor of Maracaibo.

The Spaniard stood erect with his face turned toward the great buccaneer.

Not far, off with folded arms, stood Grismhaw, and near by some other officers of the fleet.

Don San had ventured outside the retreat, and the keen eyes of a pirate had detected him.

The governor was calm.

He might be cruel and merciless, but he was no coward when faced by certain perils.

Morgan presented a terrible appearance when he raised his head and glared at Don San.

"So we've got you at last?" he cried, facing Don San. "Now, sir, where is that pretty daughter of yours?"

The lips of the Spaniard came closer together.

"It is a secret, eh?" grated the buccaneer. "You will not betray her?"

"I will not!"

"She belongs to my old friend, Moss, to whom you sold her just before my coming."

The glance of Don San roamed about the room.

"Moss is not here," and Morgan shuddered as he thought of his experience in the cell below the palace. "I left him in the fire, but he may have escaped."

He put out his arms and looked at his burned hands.

"I owe these to you," he said, with a glance of hatred at the Spaniard. "You did all this."

"I?"

"Well, two of the nuns, but it was in your palace, and I hold you responsible."

"As you will."

There was defiance in the Spaniard's tones and this only irritated Morgan.

"Where is your treasure?" he asked.

"I have none."

"Liar!" and Morgan clinched one of his hands. "I will make you speak the truth."

He called to Grimshaw, who left the cabin and soon came back with a cat o' nine tails, which he threw on the floor at Don San's feet.

The prisoner gave the whip a quick glance, then elevated his head haughtily.

"Strip his excellency!" cried Morgan.

Half a dozen sailors sprang forward to do their master's bidding, when the right hand of Don San was suddenly uplifted.

"What is it?" said Morgan, bending forward.

"Nothing, sir. These men touch the king's servant when they touch me."

A derisive laugh burst from the throat of the buccaneer.

"What care we for kings? They are our treasures. We put our hands into the royal strong boxes and take out when we want. Kings! I am the king! I am Morgan, king of the sea!"

"And Morgan, the pirate—the murderer!"

Don San fell back a pace and felt the hands of the seamen on his person.

"That's right!" cried Morgan, with a nod. "Strip the king's servant. We have a special 'cat' for such kings' servants!"

The face of the governor blanched.

"The vengeance of the whole world will fall upon you for this indignity to the servant of the king," said he. "I am more than Don San Estacado."

"More? We'll make you less ere we're through with you," grinned Morgan.

The garments of Don San fell about his waist and he stood half naked before the sea king, his white flesh gleaming like snow before the bloodshot eyes of the pirate horde.

"Now," shouted Morgan, "stand his excellency over there. And you Grimmo—you're the biggest man in the fleet—take up the 'cat' and cut a map of Spain on the governor's back."

Grimmo snatched the whip from the floor and squared himself for his work.

A dead silence fell in the little cabin of the *Catalan.*

All saw the compressed lips of Don San and noticed the cold look that came to his eyes.

He watched the rising of the whip and followed the arm of Grimmo as it neared the ceiling.

"Now, man, give it to him. We'll first cut out the rivers of Venezuela on his back and then outline Spain, ha! ha!"

The laugh of the burned buccaneer was terrible in its fierceness.

Down across the back of Don San fell the "cat."

The man winced, or, rather, the flesh quivered, for the whip left a welt that grew as red as the Spaniard's blood.

Once or twice the hands of Don San opened and shut, but otherwise he betrayed no emotion.

"Good!" cried Morgan. "Now for the first river, Grimmo."

Again the lash went up, but before it could descend a man leaped at the uplifted arm, tore the whip from the ruffian's hand and flung it over his head.

It was Don San, and his spring had been as sudden as the spring of the tiger.

Grimshaw uttered a cry at this, and Morgan's figure fell back on the couch.

Suddenly the lash hissed through the air and fell across Morgan's bandaged face.

A scream like the scream of a fiend issued from the throat of the buccaneer.

The "cat" had cut nearly through the bandages, and the man of the sea felt its sting.

Don San raised the lash again, but he was overpowered.

The arms of Grimshaw were wound round him and others sprang to Morgan's rescue, so that the Spaniard in a moment was helpless in the midst of the merciless pack.

He dropped the "cat" to the floor and smiled.

"Bring him hither," commanded Morgan. "I want to see the man who dared strike me."

They hustled Don San toward the couch, and for half a minute the sea king gazed at him, his face white and ghastly and his eyes fairly on fire.

"My pistols, Mr. Grimshaw," said Morgan.

Grimshaw brought them from a shelf on the wall and handed them to his master.

Morgan cocked one deliberately.

He looked from it into Don San's face.

"Dog of a Spaniard," cried he, "you are in my hands. You have struck me with the 'cat,' something that never before has touched the face of Morgan."

The Spaniard did not reply, but remained silent, looking down into the bandaged visage as coolly as if he were gazing into the depths of a wineglass.

"You ought to die like the dog you are," continued Morgan. "I hold your life in my hands and they say I am merciless."

"I doubt it not."

"No," and Morgan flung the weapon down. "That is too easy a death for the dog that has governed Maracaibo."

"I fear you not, monster."

"Ha! say you so? Let me show my teeth. Mr. Grimshaw, bring out the gloves."

The first officer disappeared, but soon returned, bearing in his hands a pair of large, iron gloves that opened like the gantlets of the middle ages.

"The furnace, now."

Several sailors went away and carried into the cabin a little furnace, or brazier, which they placed in the middle of the floor.

The "gloves" were placed on the fire and heated till they glowed red.

Morgan watched this process, now and then glancing up at Don San, who stood motionless, the same look of haughtiness and defiance in his eyes.

At length the pirate king waved his hand, and the "gloves" were taken from the fire with tongs.

"We'll give you the gloves of fire!" cried the buccaneer. "We keep these for distinguished prisoners. Hold out your hands if you are no coward."

Instantly the hands of Don San came forward and the men, bearing the open "gloves," heated almost to a white heat, advanced toward him.

"They spoil pretty hands, my dear Don San," laughed Morgan, "but they are warm."

In another instant the right hand of the Spanish governor shot toward the man with the tongs and snatched them from his grasp.

Grimshaw uttered a wild cry and recoiled.

Don San whirled the "gloves" above his head by means of the pincers and flung them straight at Sir Henry Morgan.

But for a quick movement on the pirate's part the "gloves" would have struck him fairly in the face.

As it was they passed over his head and struck the wall behind the couch.

A cry and a mad oath rang from Morgan's throat.

In an instant he was on his feet.

"What manner of wolf is this?" he shouted. "Are we to be defied and beaten by this Spanish dog? Seize him, men. If he is permitted to strike again I shall hang all of you to the yardarm."

Don San backed sullenly toward the wall.

He faced the mob with the courage of a lion, and his hands were clinched.

"Never mind what he has said about his king," cried out Morgan. "I'll stand between the king and you men."

Grimshaw was gathering his muscles for a spring when the door of the cabin was flung open and a vision of beauty entered the room.

Don San put out his arms and uttered a cry.

"My daughter—in this nest of vipers!" he exclaimed.

The fair girl nestled against her father's breast for a moment, and then gazed at the scene before them.

"The girl," cried Morgan. "The bird is in the snare at last! By my troth, Moss didn't half describe her beauty."

The pirate of the Caribbean feasted his eyes for a long time on Donna Paz's face and then waved Grimshaw back.

"This will bring the governor to terms," said Morgan. "I have him on the hip now."

At this juncture the girl turned upon the man on the couch.

"Is this Sir Henry Morgan?" she cried.

"At your service," bowed the corsair chief.

"Then for the first time I face this monster of the sea. I have heard and even dreamed of you——"

"A pleasant dream I trust, girl."

"Nay, it was not a happy dream," she replied. "I dreamed of ships burned at sea, of women and children murdered in sanctuaries, of maidens killed or worse than murdered. I have seen amid all these dreams a monster who strode the deck of a pirate ship—a wolf of the sea—a fiend without hope in this world or salvation in the next. Such have been my visions of thee, Sir Henry Morgan."

"Not very happy ones, as you say, fair girl," smiled the buccaneer. "I did not know I ever appeared in dreams like that to anyone. You shall have better dreams of me henceforth."

"Nay, I doubt it, for even dreams cannot turn a demon into a seraph of light."

"Come," laughed Morgan. "You are the betrothed of my old friend, Moss. I believe I shall have to rob him of his treasure. You shall become the sea wife of Sir Henry Morgan and——"

"Your sea wife? I know what that means," broke in Donna Paz. "I will never stand at any altar with a monster like you. Nay! Sooner would I take the life God has given me, though that is unpardonable. Your wife?"

The girl broke out into a derisive laugh at which Morgan lost color.

"Depart!" he said, with a look at Grimshaw and the others. "Leave me with Don San and his daughter."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH THAD ESSAYS A DESPERATE PLAY.

The looting of Maracaibo continued for some days. The poor wretches who were hunted in from the surrounding country were put to every conceivable torture, and now came a show of Morgan's merciless traits.

He ordered the cathedral containing the prisoners to be burned!

Thad's cheeks blanched at the inhuman order.

"Is the man mad?" he cried to his chums. "Can we not save the inmates from this terrible death?"

The three boys put their heads together and consulted in the privacy of their cabin.

Not far from the town lay a lagoon in which a little vessel that had escaped the eyes of the buccaneers had taken refuge.

The lads had discovered her.

It was a snug place, but the ship dared not attempt to get away for fear of being caught by the sea wolves.

Grimshaw came down the deck of the *Catalan* with a broad smile on his face.

"We fire the old pile to-night—at midnight," said he to one of his lieutenants. "We've got them cooped up like rats in a trap, and the captain says all must go."

"But Don San and his daughter?"

"He will reckon with them later. He seems to be fascinated with the girl——"

"But 'tis said that the Englishman, Moss, purchased her?"

"What if he did? He will not stand between Sir Henry and his will."

Moss had not appeared since his incarceration in the dungeon in the palace where he and Morgan faced death at the hands of the black-gowned nuns.

No one knew what had become of him.

When night came again a man who bore but little semblance to one of his kind crawled across the deck of the *Catalan*.

It was the missing Moss.

He found Sir Henry's cabin and nearly frightened the buccaneer out of his wits when that worthy laid eyes on him.

"You!" cried Morgan. "I thought the fire got you?"

"It did. I was caught in the flames, for I came out behind you," said Moss. "I was forced back and lay for some time almost in the path of the red demon. Then I managed to creep away, and here I am."

The two men looked at one another in silence for a moment.

"They tell me—I've heard it on the street—that you've got the girl."

Sir Henry winced.

At last he said, putting on a bold front:

"I have Don San and his daughter in my hands."

"Good!" cried Moss. "Then I shall not lose my beauty."

"You mean that you still expect to make the girl your wife?"

"Why not? I purchased her of her father."

"But the captives are mine now."

Moss fell back a step and gazed in utter astonishment at the man in the chair before him.

"This is not a part of the agreement," he began, when Morgan, with a gesture, silenced him.

"I command on this ship and in the fleet," said he. "What's mine is mine!"

The Englishman's face fell.

He looked savagely at Morgan for a moment and walked away.

"Good," said the buccaneer. "He knows now that he cannot override my will."

Meantime the hour for the destruction of the cathedral and its prisoners drew on.

Thad and his chums had found a plan which, if successful, would balk Morgan and save the poor wretches.

The little ship in the lagoon had been secretly visited.

They found on her deck Hawke Nelson, who had lost his ship *Sea Fawn* and who had taken possession of the sloop, the *Redbird,* by purchase.

Nelson agreed to assist the boys, and he stipulated that they should also, if possible, rescue Donna Paz.

But as the girl was on board the *Catalan* this promised to be an undertaking fraught with much danger.

"However," said Thad, "we will try."

The doors of the cathedral had been locked, and Sir Henry thought this was precaution enough.

But the streets of the looted city were full of half-drunken pirates, who still searched for treasure and who made the night hideous with their wolfish cries.

Thad went aboard the *Catalan.*

He pretended not to have heard of the cruel order, and when he appeared to Morgan that person complimented him on his bravery in trying to find the fuse in the fort.

"Captain," said Thad, becoming confidential, "there is a young lady in the cathedral who is dying, and she would like to see Donna Paz, her friend, for a little while."

Morgan's brow clouded.

Did the buccaneer suspect?

Thad almost held his breath while he waited for the captain's answer.

"I can't let my bird go," said he.

"Not for a little while? Her friend can't die until she has confided to Donna Paz an important secret."

"Ah! these women's secrets—they amount to nothing," laughed Morgan.

"Then the poor thing will die in agony."

Morgan seemed to relent.

"I cannot quit the ship to escort her to the place," he answered. "Besides, I have something on hand after midnight."

"It lacks almost two hours of that time."

"So it does."

The buccaneer seemed to ponder for a moment, and when he raised his head Thad caught a ray of hope.

"If you will escort Donna Paz to the church and bring her back, she may go."

"I'll escort her safely through the streets," said Thad, eagerly. "They are wild with rabble from the ships——"

"I would take some of my guns ashore if I dared and strew the streets with the rascals!" cried Morgan.

It being thus arranged for Donna Paz to accompany Thad to the cathedral, the lad went to see her.

He dared not tell her his scheme.

Therefore he told her the same story he had poured into Morgan's ears, and she listened intently.

"Who is it?" asked the girl. "I know of no friend of mine in the cathedral."

"She would not tell me her name," said Thad.

"Let us go, then," cried Donna Paz. "I can leave my father so short a time in safety."

In a few minutes Thad and Donna Paz were on the street.

They were closely watched by Oliver and Simon, who kept their distance and saw to it that the couple were not molested by the sailor rabble from the fleet.

When near the holy place Thad stopped and told Donna Paz all.

"Your father shall escape from Sir Henry's hands. I promise you that," Thad said, solemnly. "Nelson, the American and your friend, has a new ship in the lagoon."

"He escaped the storm, then?"

"He is safe.'

Donna Paz clasped her hands and breathed a prayer of joy.

"He awaits the captives in the cathedral," continued Thad. "I have arranged for their flight. The church is not guarded. They can reach the lagoon under cover of the foliage. We will have them all on board the *Redbird* before Morgan's men come to apply the torch."

"If I only thought we could——"

"We can, Donna Paz. It is flying from certain death, and you will land in your lover's arms."

"But if Sir Henry should discover——"

"He will not."

"But the church may be secretly guarded."

"We must take our chances. It may be a fight between the cathedral and the lagoon, but there are stout hearts, and among them Hawke Nelson, on the way."

The couple reached the church, and Thad tried the heavy door.

Donna Paz told of a secret way underneath the old pile which she had heard of.

This was found, and Thad appeared suddenly to the frightened inmates of the strange prison.

They consented to go.

One by one they emerged from the place and crept away under cover of the night.

Thad led them toward the rendezvous agreed upon with Hawke Nelson and found that worthy on guard

"Where's my bird?" cried the sailor, as he sprang forward at sight of Thad.

"Here!" and Donna Paz came forward.

Meanwhile Morgan was pacing the floor of his cabin. He was restless and ill at ease.

"There may be some trick about this," he cried. "Why did I consign the girl into Thad's hands? The young rat is in love with her himself, and——"

He paused and glanced at his watch.

"It lacks but half an hour of the time for the burning," he said. "I have my men ready. I don't intend to let any of these people escape. 'Twill fill the hearts of Gibraltar with dread, and they will fall an easy prey."

He went to the door and opened it.

"Call Grimshaw," he said to the man on guard.

But Grimshaw could not be found, whereupon Morgan gave vent to a volley of oaths, going back into the cabin and buckling on his sword.

"I'll go myself," cried he. "This matter must be looked into at once. Fool that I was to let the girl out of my clutches! Moss may have a hand in this——"

At that moment the guard halted some one, and Morgan, looking out, caught sight of the Englishman.

"What brought you back?" snarled the buccaneer. "I told you that the girl belongs to me."

"Fiend! scoundrel!" cried Moss, as he lunged forward. "Defend yourself!"

Before Morgan could touch a weapon the man was in the room with a naked blade in his hand.

Morgan retreated a step or two and whipped out his sword, and the next moment there was a ring of steel in the captain's cabin.

"It's the last theft of your life!" hissed Moss over his blade. "You will never rob another man of his bride."

The guard stood at the door and looked on, dazed at the spectacle.

He did not doubt the outcome, for he had the utmost faith in his captain's agility.

Up and down the room went the two men.

The bright steel struck off a shower of angry sparks that tallied with the wild flashes of the men's eyes and at last Morgan had Moss at his mercy.

The Englishman's sword had been twisted from his hand and had fallen at Morgan's feet.

"I surrender," said Moss.

"I never forgive!" was the answer.

"But you won't kill a defenseless man?"

"I will kill you!"

The lips of Morgan came together at the last word, and the blade went forward like a streak of light.

The man before it threw up his hands and staggered back.

A little blood gushed over his lips, his eyes gave a quick, spasmodic twitch, and then he fell in a heap on the floor.

"The fool!" said Morgan, coolly wiping his sword. "He thought he could best the best swordsman in the Caribbean!"

Then the buccaneer waved his hand at the guard to take the body away, while he plunged through the corridor leading to the upper deck of the *Catalan*.

CHAPTER XIV.

SUCCESSFULLY TRICKED.

Down the streets of old Maracaibo came a man with a sword in his hand.

It was Sir Henry Morgan.

His bandaged face rendered him a thing of horror, but he cared not for that.

Where was Grimshaw?

At last he found that worthy, a little tipsy and not inclined to obey orders with dispatch.

"The girl isn't back yet!" cried Morgan.

"What girl?"

"Donna Paz."

"I left her aboard the *Catalan*——"

"But I let Thad take her to the cathedral to see a dying friend, and——"

"The more fool you, Sir Henry," cried Grimshaw, breaking in. "That boy is up to some trick. He's tricked you."

"Come, we'll see," and the buccaneer bounded away.

When near the cathedral its old bells chimed the hour of midnight and Morgan paused a moment.

"It is time for the fire," said Grimshaw. "You remember your orders."

"Yes. Get the girl out first."

Grimshaw went to the steps of the place and looked at the locks.

"The locks are intact on the outside," said he, turning a puzzled face to Morgan.

"On—the—outside?" cried the chief of the pirates.

"Come and see for yourself," said Grimshaw. "There is a trick here."

Morgan hammered on the carven door of the church with the hilt of his sword.

"It's silent in there," said he, looking over his shoulder at his companion.

"Open it!" and Grimshaw unlocked the locks of the door.

"Why, 'tis empty!" he cried.

Morgan uttered a mad cry.

"Empty! The church?"

"Look." Grimshaw held the door open and Morgan sprang inside.

"The trick! the trick!" he said, reeling back. "Call the men. Go and muster the forces, Mr. Grimshaw."

The first officer ran back, chuckling to himself and soon vanished.

It did not take long for him to return with a good force at his back.

Morgan was still on guard at the door of the cathedral.

"We'll find them," said Grimshaw. "They can't trick us very long."

As the first officer paused something that looked like a specter darted across the church.

Morgan fell back with a loud cry.

"What was it?" cried Grimshaw, springing to his side.

"The ghost in black!" was the answer. "Or, it may have been one of the three black sisters."

With an oath Morgan darted after the object, but stopped suddenly as something rose in one of the aisles and fell upon him.

The shriek that rang from the throat of the buccaneer filled the old church.

"The captain! save the captain!" cried Grimshaw, darting into the place.

The next moment something rose from the body of Morgan and fled.

Down the aisle Grimshaw pursued with drawn sword and a cry on his lips.

He overtook his quarry at the great altar and caught it with one hand.

The nun turned at Grimshaw's clutch and faced him.

"The black sister!" cried the first officer. "You shall feel the hand of Sir Henry Morgan!"

As quick as a flash the nun flung herself upon the first officer of the *Catalan*.

Twice a dagger rose and fell, and as Grimshaw reeled from her hands she darted on again.

By this time the nun had the whole yelling force of pirates at her heels.

Morgan was on his feet and Grimshaw was lying on the stones calling out his wild commands.

In another moment a tiny flame appeared on the ceiling of the cathedral.

It spread with wondrous rapidity.

The superstitious men paused and watched it for a moment and saw great red tongues dart toward them.

"The holy fire!" shouted all, and there was a scramble for the door.

Pellmell into the night rushed the pirate horde.

All the oaths and beratings of Morgan could neither stop nor call them back.

A panic had fallen upon his men.

He stopped and tried to find Grimshaw.

That worthy, wounded by the dagger of the black nun, had thrown himself from a window and was crawling toward the plaza.

Maracaibo threatened to become a shambles for the buccaneers.

Morgan discovered when he reached the plaza that his men had fled to the ships.

He could not muster them again.

Grimshaw was soon found under cover of a bush, where he hailed his chief.

"Let's get out of this place," cried he. "We have the very stars against us. We haven't got much loot, and if we remain here we'll lose our lives."

"Fool!" We will find the girl first."

"You'll find her where her American lover is, for I'm sure now that he escaped the storm."

"Then we'll reckon with Don San," hissed Morgan.

The two buccaneers went back to the vessels.

"Send Don San here," said Morgan, as he seated himself in his cabin. "I'll make him bring his daughter back."

"Captain, Don San has escaped."

Morgan was on his feet in an instant.

"Then I'll hang his guards——"

"But he killed his guards."

"And is gone—man and daughter!"

Morgan fell back in the chair and thought for a moment.

"Grimshaw is right. The curse is upon us," said he, half under his breath. "We've had nothing but trouble ever since we set out on this expedition. We may fare better at Gibraltar."

Meantime Thad and his chums, with the late prisoners, were well on their way to the concealed vessel in the lagoon.

They had outwitted Sir Henry Morgan and had saved the lives of the doomed captives.

Of course, the boys dared not, for the present at least, go back to the *Catalan*.

They knew that the hand of Morgan would fall heavily upon them, therefore they resolved to take service for the time under Hawke Nelson.

"We are away from the black flag at last!" cried Thad. "We have a new flag, and one that we can serve. But some day perhaps we will again fall in with Sir Henry Morgan, who won't forget the trick of Maracaibo."

The *Redbird* with her precious cargo managed to escape the watchful eyes of the buccaneers and slipped from the lagoon.

If Thad and his chums could have looked ahead and seen what awaited them they might have sighed for the berths of the *Catalan* and the tyranny of Grimshaw and Morgan, but a kind Providence hid from them the exciting future.

The *Redbird* was destined to see some stirring times, and the three boys were entering upon one of the most exciting episodes of their adventurous careers. These will be fully detailed in the next issue of the RED RAVEN LIBRARY, which appears next week under the title of "The Buccaneer's Ghost; or, Thad's Adventures Among the Pearl Divers."

THE END.

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